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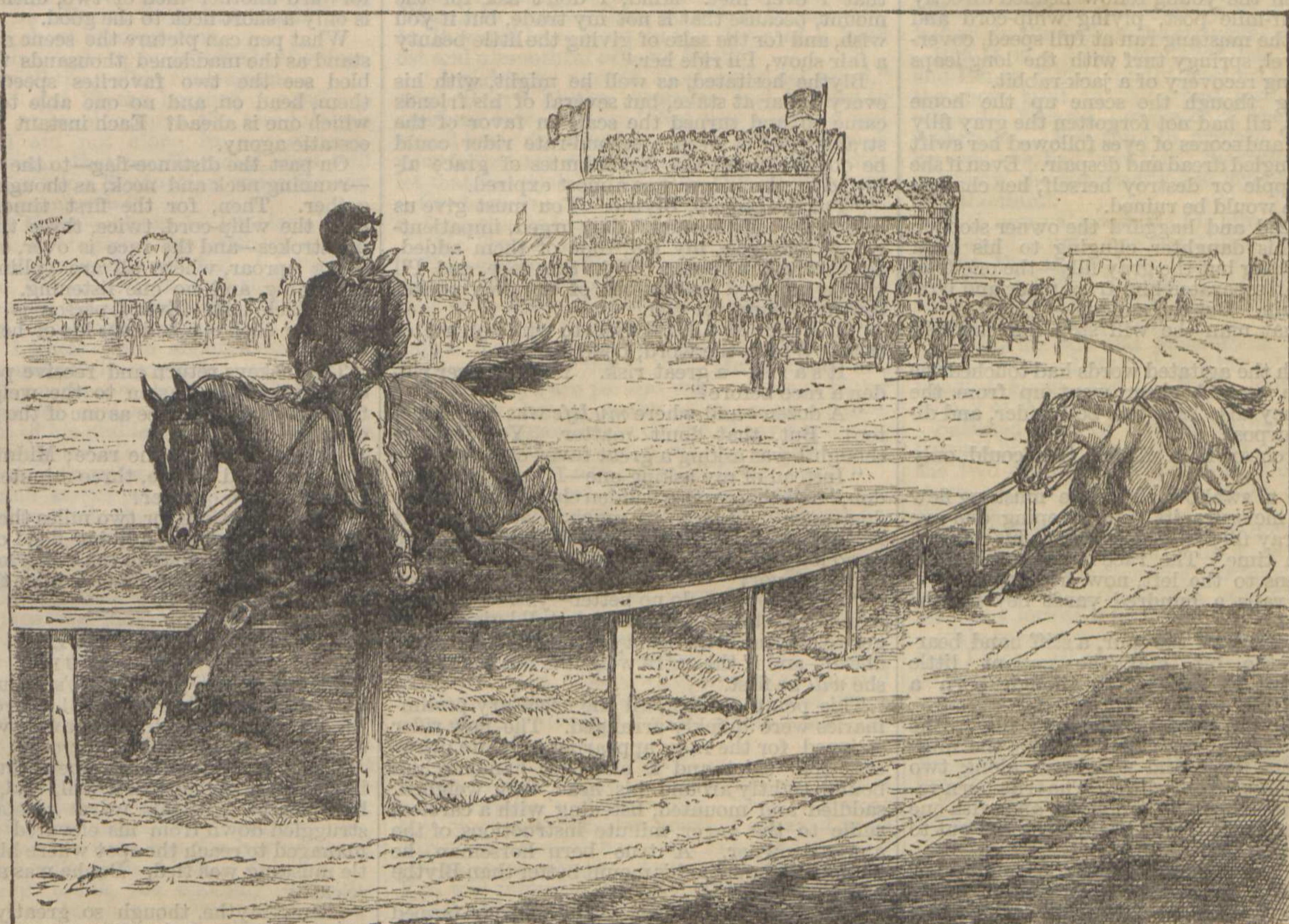
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Now! a touch of the spur, a stiff hand bearing upon the bit, and the gallant little mustang rises at the rail as though born a hurdler.

The Boy Jockey; OR, Honesty versus Crookedness.

BY JOSEPH E. BADGER, JR.

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CHAPTER I.

PLUCKED FROM THE FIRE.

A DULL roar as of gathering waters, broken ever and anon by a shriller note; words faint and indistinct, because blended together; the music so dear to the hearts of all those who love the turf. The grand stand crowded to suffocation with wildly excited, eagerly watching humanity; the quarter stretch lined ten deep with footmen, horsemen and carriages; the eager eyes of all turned in one direction.

In that direction, a dozen high-strung horses, with starting eyeballs and distended nostrils, now stepping short and high with impatiently tossing heads, now rearing erect despite the strong hand upon the bit, or wheeling sharply around with a fiery longing to begin the stubborn, heart-bursting race. The monkey-like, hump-backed figures of the riders, decked out in gaudy colors, in skull-caps, jackets, cords and

top-boots eying each other with suspicious, uneasy, yet exultant glances. The hoarse, heated, worried and generally uncomfortable man who officiates as starter; upon these the eyes of all that vast concourse are riveted.

As by one impulse ten-thousand hearts give a mighty bound that sends the hot blood surging through the veins, and momentarily robs the eyes of what they have been so eagerly watching for this hour past. A clatter of steel-shod hoofs—they are off! A swirling eddy of wind and dust—they are past—it is a start! Was that the tap of the drum? Tang—tang—tang! The huge bell is ringing them back for a more even start. And the mass of spectators settle down with a long breath that is almost a curse.

For a full hour this has been going on, and at least a dozen false starts have been made. The stake is a rich one, the rivalry is high and the betting still higher. A slight advantage at the send off may decide the race, and the jockeys are riding with their brains full as much as with their bodies.

In sharp, impatient tones, the judges summon the riders before the stand and order them to score by a certain level-headed horse, under penalty of the heaviest fine the rules would permit them to impose.

"The gray filly first, the black gelding second, and the rest tailing, for a thousand!" cried a clear young voice from the inclosure, near the judges' stand.

"I'm your man—" but the enthusiastic prophet was already pressing his way through the densely-crowded mass, and neither heard nor heeded the acceptance of his challenge.

A fine-looking fellow he was, too, though roughly dressed and mounted upon a shaggy, vicious-looking mustang pony. Slender, yet finely-built and admirably-muscled, of medium height, in slouched felt hat, blue flannel shirt, buck-skin pants and beaded moccasins. Truly an outlandish figure among that mass of beauty and fashion, he hastened on until he could crowd to the rails and gain a fair view of the racers.

Stranger though he was, his eye, that of a true horseman, had picked out the two favorites in the black and the gray, though reversing the places assigned them by the betting-ring. The gaunt, long-bodied black gelding was the first favorite, the shorter, smaller, finer-limbed gray filly only second choice. Both were backed heavily, by their owners, as well as by the followers of their respective stables, and popular interest ran extraordinarily high, since both animals were entered for the—let us call it—"Washington Cup," to be run two weeks from that day. The winner of this race would be made first favorite for the Cup.

The young horseman knew nothing of all this. He had eyes only for the little drama being enacted before him, and a sharp cry of anger parted his lips as he witnessed an act of deliberate treachery that threatened defeat, if not

worse, to the beautiful filly, with which he had fallen in love.

He saw the man standing at her head cruelly wrenching her jaw with the bit; saw the rider pressing the rowels of his spurs deep into her sides; saw him slip his feet from the stirrups just as the tortured animal reared up and broke away; saw the jockey let loose the reins and fall from the saddle; saw the filly dart down the home-stretch with the speed of the wind, amid the wild yells of men and screams of women.

The wildest confusion ensued among horses and men. Already half-maddened, the fiery animals reared and plunged, striving to break from those who struggled to control them. Owners, trainers and grooms were hastening to the rescue. Men and boys were flocking over the rails and up the track. From the thickest of the plunging, trampling, came one shrill, agonizing scream of agony, and when the mass parted a still figure was seen lying there, its scarlet jacket being slowly dyed with crimson stains.

That one cry of indignant rage was all that the young man in the blue flannel shirt uttered. It came too late to do any good, and if it reached any other ears, the exciting scene which followed, quickly obliterated its memory.

Like his neighbors, this young man seemed growing crazy, but there was method in his madness. Under a strong pull, the shaggy mustang reared up, wheeled as upon a pivot, then lowered its head and fairly butted its way through the thickening crowd. One swift glance around, then the young fellow headed directly for the half-mile post, plying whip-cord and steel until the mustang ran at full speed, covering the level, springy turf with the long leaps and lightning recovery of a jack-rabbit.

Absorbing though the scene up the home stretch was, all had not forgotten the gray filly Aphrodite, and scores of eyes followed her swift flight, in mingled dread and despair. Even if she did not cripple or destroy herself, her chances for the race would be ruined.

White-faced and haggard the owner stood in the stand, his daughter clinging to his arm. He saw nothing but the gray filly—the one frail barrier that separated him from utter and irretrievable ruin. But the maiden—

"See! that man—he will stop her—he will save her!"

As though the agitated words had touched the key-note, a united cheer went up from the crowd. They also saw the bold rider, and divined his purpose.

That one cheer, then silence; they could only watch.

Swift as a swallow the little mustang flew across the inclosure, its rider keeping one eye upon the gray filly as if to calculate his chances of being in time. The race is close—too close, and he leans to the left, now heading so as to strike the rails a hundred yards beyond the painted post.

Now! a touch of the spur, a stiff hand bearing upon the bit, and the gallant little mustang rises at the rail as though born a hurdler!

Almost in the face of the gray filly. She swerves and loses her stride. Catlike, the mustang recovers itself, and now races along, two lengths ahead of Aphrodite. The true-born racer forgets its fear in its ambition, and with one eager toss of its lady-like head, stretches out to win the race or die!

The young rider smiles grimly. The filly has the pole. She is gaining upon him at every stride. He touches the left hand rein gently, then frees his feet from the stirrups. Another moment she is alongside, running with the swift, level motion of an engine. She will pass him—

No! An enthusiastic cheer bursts from the crowd. They see the young man leap lightly from horse to filly—see her start with an afrightened, sidelong jump; then they see her emerge from the cloud of dust, and upon her back rides the blue-shirted hero, as though born to the pig-skin!

Then it was that the cheer was given until the welkin rung, and all semblance of order was cast to the winds, as the gray filly came cantering down the quarter stretch, with the shaggy mustang bringing up the rear at a respectful distance.

The case was not an ordinary one. An immense amount of money was depending upon the filly, and her defeat would mean ruin to more than one. If she lost the race upon her merits, it would be bad enough; how much worse if she had not a chance to win?

The act was bold, quick-witted and most adroitly performed. This, added to the more selfish reason just given, sufficiently accounts for the enthusiasm of the crowd which greeted the young hero.

"Sound as a dollar, boss," he said, with a short, merry laugh, as the owner stooped to feel of the filly's limbs. "Ef ary thing's sprung or giv' way, I'll eat my hat!"

The owner, Henry Blythe by name, looked up into the frank, smiling countenance, and motioned the lad to dismount. Then, bidding the groom look carefully to the animal, he moved

away from the crowd, followed by the lad, close behind whom came the mustang.

"Who and what are you?" he said, abruptly, turning around.

"A two-legged boy, boss, just drapped in to see the hoss-critters run," was the prompt response, but one less agitated than Henry Blythe might have seen that the lad felt hurt by such a peremptory address.

"Come to this address to-night," said Blythe, hurriedly, thrusting a card into the lad's hand. "I have not enough money with me now to pay for the service you have done me, but I am grateful—"

"What I did was not for money, sir," and there was a sudden and complete change in the speech and demeanor of the lad that even Blythe could not overlook. "I believe in fair play. When I saw they were all working against the filly, I was mad enough to cry, and it was to spite them that I caught her as I did."

"Who do you mean by *them*?"

"The groom, the rider and all. I know nothing about you, sir, but I will say this: If you wish that filly to win this race, put up an honest rider, with a cool head, and win it she will. There's only one horse—the black—that can give her anything like a brush, and with an even chance, she can make him take her dust."

"My jockey was hurt—I don't know of another one that I dare trust—unless *you* will do it?" exclaimed Blythe, with a sudden brightening up. "How heavy do you ride?"

"I weigh one-thirty; but I can ride fifteen pounds lighter than any other of my weight that I ever met. Mind, I don't ask for the mount, because that is not my trade, but if you wish, and for the sake of giving the little beauty a fair show, I'll ride her."

Blythe hesitated, as well he might, with his every dollar at stake, but several of his friends came up, and turned the scale in favor of the stranger. Not even a second-rate rider could be obtained, and the few minutes of grace allowed by the judges was almost expired.

"Put the boy up, Blythe. You must give us a show for our money," they urged, impatiently. "And you, my lad," one of them added, addressing the youth: "Win this race, and I'll give a hundred dollars out of my own pocket toward a purse for you."

"If I ride at all, I'll ride to win, be sure of that. What's the word, boss?"

"It's a risk—a great risk. You've never ridden a race before?"

"A dozen—and where *my life* was the stake, too! But, that don't matter. You act as though I was asking a great favor of you—"

"Instead of my asking one—I beg your pardon," and there was a sudden change in Blythe's demeanor. "I have so much at stake, that it is only natural I should hesitate; but I will do so no longer. Will you ride the filly for me—as a great favor?"

"Since you can do no better—yes. I haven't a dollar at stake, gentlemen, but I'd give a finger to see the little beauty come under the wire ahead—and if the extra weight is not too much, she *will* be first."

This point decided, all the necessary preliminaries were quickly arranged. The new rider stripped for the race, appearing in white drawers, blue shirt and a blue silk handkerchief bound tightly around his head, then weighed, saddled and mounted, listening with a careless smile to the eager, minute instructions of the anxious owner. A true born horseman, he already understood his mount better than Blythe could tell him.

Two more false starts, then the drum tapped to a tolerably fair send-off, the favorite, if anything, with a little the best of it.

Around the turn to the first quarter, and the black horse is still in the lead, hugging the pole closely and running like clockwork. Often tested, seldom defeated, his owner has implicit confidence in his staying powers, and has given the jockey orders to run the race from end to end, feeling confident that ere the two miles are covered, that extra twenty pounds will tell the tale upon the gray filly, his only really dangerous competitor.

At the half-mile, there is little change, though one or two of the field are slowly losing ground, thus early finding themselves in too good company. A dozen lengths behind Midnight comes Aphrodite, and many a heart beats anxiously as they fancy she is losing or gaining ground.

Around the upper turn, and now the swiftly moving figures come in sight at the head of the home stretch.

The hum of the human swarm grows louder and more intense with every second. They can see that the black gelding still holds the pole—that through the dust-cloud a white head is protruding—and now! a gleam of something blue, growing more and more distinct. The gray filly—she is gaining—ahead—no, the black—see! they are here! A clatter of hoofs—a swirl of wind—and they are gone!

Midnight leading, Aphrodite an open length behind, the remainder trailing, several already out of the race.

In this order the racers pass beneath the wire. The leading jockey receives a signal to push ahead; a desperate policy, since the watches of

the judges record only one minute and forty-five seconds, but there is more than money at stake upon this race.

Henry Blythe's heart gives a fierce leap as his new rider in passing gives a swift wave of his hand; an action that speaks louder than words. It says, "Do not despair—the race is ours!"

The amateur jockey firmly believed what his signal conveyed. Thus far Aphrodite had run under a steady pull, and he knew that at any portion of the first mile he could have given her her head and gone to the front, but he knew that, in two miles, the extra weight would prove a heavy handicap.

Inch by inch he allowed the filly to creep up, until, at the half-mile post, she was lapping the leader. Even at that distance he could hear the wild, enthusiastic cheers of Aphrodite's partisans, and for the moment he felt a fierce temptation to cast prudence to the winds and send the silver head to the front—the intoxicating delirium that has lost so many an almost won race—but he smothered the impulse, and tightened his grasp upon the reins, holding his position and no more, until the three-quarter post was reached.

Gradually he slackened his grasp. Inch by inch the filly closed upon the gelding. Her head was at his saddle-girth as they entered the home stretch.

The keen spur is already scoring the ribs of Midnight. Twice the lithe whip hisses through the air—but the blue rider only smiles as he sees his gallant mount thrusting her dainty head forward another inch or two, until the gelding is only a short neck to the good.

What pen can picture the scene at the grand stand as the maddened thousands there assembled see the two favorites speeding toward them, head on, and no one able to even guess which one is ahead? Each instant is an age of ecstatic agony.

On past the distance-flag—to the grand stand—running neck and neck, as though coupled together. Then, for the first time, Aphrodite feels the whip-cord, twice, three times, in hissing strokes—and the race is over, amid a deafening uproar, where all are yelling, shouting, screaming, and no one listening. Which won and which lost? Every person is wildly exultant, for each one believes his or her choice has won.

The jockeys return and receive permission to dismount; they hasten to the weighing-room; then all is utter silence as one of the judges leans over the railing.

"Aphrodite wins the race; Midnight second; Redman third. Time, three minutes, thirty-five seconds and a quarter!"

The fastest time for two miles then on record!

One united cheer—a living flood of enthusiastic humanity, and then the victorious jockey is lifted from his feet and borne upon the shoulders of the crowd.

CHAPTER II.

"TRUE BLUE."

"HURRAY fer the b'y! It's throe blue he is be nathur as will as be dress! Three chairs fer the hayro, an' the devil fly away wid the wan as don't do hammer to the hurroo!"

The cheers called for by the enthusiastic Patlander were given with a will, and, half-angry, half-pleased with his warm reception, the lad struggled down from his elevated position and managed to reach the spot where his shaggy little mustang was tied. But he was not to escape so easily.

Henry Blythe, though so greatly excited by his victory, plucked, as it were, out of the fire, lost no time in tearing himself from the eager throng of congratulating friends, his mind full of the stranger who had done him this great service.

As he was staring anxiously around, in quest of the boy jockey, he caught sight of a tiny, gloved hand, beckoning to him from a balcony of the club-house, and recognizing his daughter, at once hastened to her side.

"There he is," pointing down beside the picket-fence. "I was afraid you would forget him, and so kept him in sight. Go to him, please, papa, and thank him for me—"

"I'll do better than that, Cora. Wait here for me."

There was no lack of earnestness in Henry Blythe. Whatever he did, he did with his whole heart, with a rush that only too often proved disastrous; but he was like an ill-regulated watch—running down too soon.

Kind and open-hearted, he had a new hobby every other day, and thus frittered away the talents and energy which would, if directed aright, long since have carried him to the top-most spoke of Fortune's wheel. Instead, he had run through with three very comfortable fortunes, and had the judges given in their decision against Aphrodite, instead of in her favor, Henry Blythe would have been worse than a beggar when the sun went down that day.

But enough of this subject for the present.

The boy jockey caught sight of Henry Blythe pushing through the motley crowd toward him, and for an instant meditated a masterly retreat.

Now that the wild, unreasoning excitement of

the moment was past, he seriously regretted the prominent part he had played before so many curious eyes, for more reasons than one.

He had work on hand that was to make or mar his whole future—work that must be done in secret if he hoped for success. Yet he had impulsively made himself the cynosure of ten thousand curious eyes, thus making his life-task all the more difficult.

Taught by a wild and eventful life, if a short one, to read the human face almost as readily as a printed page, he had formed a tolerably correct idea of Henry Blythe, and knew that he was not the friend or patron one should choose who, like himself, needed to work in the twilight, where his trail might the more readily be hidden. But a quick glance around showed him that escape would be almost impossible, unless at the risk of attracting still closer attention, and so he chose the lesser of the two evils, quietly awaiting the approach of Henry Blythe, though mentally deciding that he would cut the interview as short as he possibly could, without absolute courtesy.

But this he soon found was not so easily done.

"Never mind your dress, man," cried Henry Blythe, heartily, overruling his first objection. What if you have lost your hat? That handkerchief looks ten times better—and it made a thousand hearts leap with joy to see it first under the wire to-day. I'll never race under any other color, while I have a hoof in training. *True Blue forever!*"

From a black, heart-sickening despair, the veteran turfite had been lifted into the seventh heaven of delight, and, unable to contain himself longer, he uttered these last words in a clear, ringing shout of exultation.

The cry was caught up by hundreds of voices, and echoed until the welkin rung again.

"You see," and Blythe laughed joyously at the startled expression upon the boy-jockey's features; "I am not alone in my opinion. While you wear that handkerchief, you will never need to ask a Kentuckian twice for any favor he can grant you."

"I ask no favor—only to be let alone," the youth returned, laughing, but with more sincerity than he received credit for. "I won the race for you, but I had a glorious ride, and the satisfaction of seeing the best horse win, in spite of the dirty trickery that was used to spoil her chances; so I guess we're about even. Let's shake hands and call it square."

"Not until you receive the thanks of the little mare's owner, at any rate," laughed Blythe, signaling one of his stable boys, and giving the shaggy mustang into his hands. "Come! I see her beckoning us to make haste."

As the band struck up just then, the boy jockey failed to catch the sense of Blythe's last words, or he would not have yielded so easily to the strong arm that drew him through the crowd with impetuous eagerness.

Passing through the weighing-room, up the stairs and into the judge's stand, they were greeted by a fairy-like vision that almost took away the breath of the boy jockey.

His brown, hardened paw was warmly clasped between two delicately kinned hands, which looked ridiculously small by force of contrast; eyes of the deepest, most lustrous blue, were gazing up into his face with an interest that sent the hot blood bounding through his young veins with an almost painful rapidity, while a soft, childlike voice was impulsively thanking him, not for winning the race, but for having saved her loved Aphrodite from death or disaster.

"I can never thank you enough," were the first words that the boy jockey really distinguished. "It was a brave and gallant action—and you a stranger to us and her—that makes our debt all the greater—so great that I fear we will never be able to repay it, Mr.—"

The little, inquiring pause here told the boy jockey he was expected to speak, if only to announce his name; and speak he did, though hardly conscious of what he said, so great was his confusion, so disordered were his nerves with that warm, almost caressing touch upon his hand, and those bewildering eyes gazing into his own as though reading his innermost thoughts.

"True Blue, ma'am—that is—"

A short, mocking laugh filled up the hiatus which followed this stammering speech, and for the first time the boy jockey noticed a tall, handsome, though rather foppishly dressed young man standing just behind Miss Cora Blythe, apparently that young lady's escort, who was curiously eying him through a glass.

In an instant his wonted coolness returned to him, for he instinctively felt that this man was an enemy. Why, he could not have told, had the question been asked, but, believe it he did, and from that moment he was upon his guard.

In his confusion, and upon the spur of the moment, he had uttered the words that were still ringing in his ears—the title given him by the enthusiastic son of the Emerald Isle—nor was he at all sorry that such was the case. For good and sufficient reasons, he had resolved to keep his real name secret, and that sobriquet would serve his purpose as well as another.

"My name is True Blue, lady," he said, with a half-defiant glance toward the smiling gentle-

man who was still quizzing him through his eye-glass. If I have been of service to you or yours, your thanks have repaid me, a thousand-fold. After all, I only gave the little beauty a fair chance; she won the race on her own merits."

"I don't know that," interposed the gentleman with the eyeglass. "You rode as though you were born to the pig-skin, and brought more out of little Aphrodite than almost any one believed was in her. If I had known as much about your riding then as now, it would have been money in your pocket."

"I don't think I exactly understand you, sir," said True Blue—as we will call him until he sees fit to resume his own name—with a keen look. "Please explain."

"That is easily done," the other laughed, but with an undercurrent of earnestness in his apparently jesting words that did not escape the sharp-witted youth. "Unfortunately, I had nearly a thousand dollars bet on *Midnight*, all of which your remarkably fine riding lost for me. Now fifty dollars would have been wisely spent in saving the rest—"

"That is, you would have offered me fifty dollars to throw the race, had you believed there was any chance of my winning?" interrupted True Blue.

"Exactly: that is, I should have been strongly tempted to do something of the kind," he added, as Cora Blythe turned toward him with an indignant exclamation.

"Ignorance was *your* bliss in this case, then," was the blunt response. "You would have found my answer to such an insult even more difficult to swallow than your loss in money—for it would have come in the shape of a hard fist and a mouthful of loose teeth."

"A righteous answer, most aptly delivered," cried Henry Blythe, returning just in time to overhear these words. "Not that I believe you would have done such a thing, Alfred, though your father, my worshipful cousin, might. But, let that flea stick by the wall. This young man—I've been so excited and busy that I have really forgotten to inquire his name—"

"Mr. True Blue, father," interposed Cora.

The veteran turfite elevated his brows in surprise at this curious name, but he was too well-bred to be taken aback for more than an instant.

"And never was there a more appropriate name!" he cried, warmly grasping the hand of the boy jockey. "Mr. Blue, Mr. Hudson—one of those very rare persons who are much better than they try to make other people believe. Alfred, this gentleman is one of my particular friends, and if you can serve him in any way, I will remember it as a personal favor."

Thus introduced, the twain shook hands, but True Blue felt his instinctive dislike deepen, despite the warmth with which his grasp was returned. There was a trace of scornful contempt in Alfred Hudson's smile that stung him to the quick, and he knew that, upon his own side, at least, there would never be anything between them but uncompromising enmity.

During this hollow ceremony, Cora Blythe, standing upon tiptoe, whispered a few hurried words into her father's ear, the purport of which was quickly divulged by the whole-souled, impulsive turfite.

"Of course he will go with us—that is understood; though it may be well enough to have a more definite understanding. True, my dear boy, you must consider yourself engaged to us during the meeting here, and as much longer as you can spare the time from your other friends. You will return to the hotel with us this evening—just a little party to celebrate our victory—and there'll be several fine fellows there who will be overjoyed to make your acquaintance. Say you will come?"

During this speech True Blue watched Henry Blythe closely, but his suspicions were not confirmed. The old gentleman was undeniably in earnest. To him, at least, the dress did not make the man.

The boy jockey felt his heart go out toward the kindly, generous speaker, but his answer was given with an unhesitating firmness that told he was not to be persuaded.

"You are very kind, sir, but I will not impose on good nature so far as that. I would be very poor company for your friends, and I have my own work to do. All the same, I am much obliged to you."

Bowing, with a native grace, to Cora Blythe, True Blue turned to leave the stand, but he was not suffered to do so alone.

"You are not so pressed for time but you can give me a few moments' private conversation?" asked Blythe, as he accompanied the boy jockey down the steps and out into the open air.

"An hour, if you like," was the prompt response. "I never could see any fun in a trotting-race. It's too slow sport to suit me."

Henry Blythe said nothing more until they reached the grateful shade cast by a small tree which stood near the center of the wide inclosure, far beyond danger of their words being overheard by any curious ears.

Then, placing his hands upon the boy jockey's shoulders, the old man gazed long and steadily into the fair, open countenance of the boy. Though wondering, True Blue bore the close

scrutiny unflinchingly, and quietly awaited his new-found friend's explanation.

"Unless my eyes have lost their cunning, I can trust you as though you were my own son—and I will trust you!" uttered Blythe, earnestly. "But for you, the chances are that I would never have seen another sun rise in this world. If the filly had been disabled—if she had not won this race—"

"But she did win it," quickly interposed True Blue, beginning to feel uncomfortable.

"Thanks to you—yes," added Blythe. "But the end will be the same, unless that victory can be repeated. Let me tell you just how I stand with the world, and then I have a question to ask—a favor, rather."

The substance alone of what he said need be given here, as it can be more briefly stated:

Henry Blythe came of a racing family, but where his more immediate ancestors were unusually "lucky," the close of each racing-season showing a heavier balance in their favor, the exact opposite was the case with him. As already intimated, he had squandered three moderate fortunes upon the turf, ill-fortune attending his adventures almost invariably, and an extensive breeding-establishment made a constant and heavy drain upon his purse. His best racers went amiss, or broke down in training. Even when a horse was brought to the post in fit condition, and he wagered heavily upon the result, hoping to, in part, make good his heavy losses, some accident was almost sure to occur; the animal upon which his hopes were placed would be left at the post—would be "cut down" by an opponent while racing—or, if all else failed, would be deliberately "pulled" by its jockey, in the face of the stringent rules.

But it is a long lane that has no turning, and Henry Blythe fondly dreamed he had found the short road to glory and restored wealth, when he became possessed of the gray filly Aphrodite. Her time in private trials, under his own eye, had been fairly marvelous. Though so young, she was steady and level-headed—one of a thousand.

With unusual prudence for him—Blythe kept her secluded until she was three years old, and during the spring meeting, she had carried everything before her, and her owner, in stakes and pools, won a goodly sum, though much less than he had anticipated.

Despite his care and precautions, hints of the wonderful speed of the "dark horse" were freely bandied about, and he could only place his money at long odds.

Satisfied that at last he really possessed a "world-beater," Blythe entered Aphrodite for the two events which principally concern this story, and backed her for as much as he could "get on."

The "ill-luck" which had followed him so long that it had become a by-word among the turfites, was forgotten in his enthusiasm. If he won both events, he would nearly make good his many losses; if he lost—

"There is only one horse entered for the cup that I am at all afraid of, provided all goes well with the mare, and there is no foul play—that is the black gelding, *Midnight*. He was brought here from the East, as I believe, for the especial purpose of beating my pet. They are weighted the same—115 pounds. If you only rode a little lighter—"

"I'm glad I don't," was the blunt reply. "There's too much at stake for the job to be a pleasant one. There is time enough. You can get a better man for the position; one who knows more about the tricks of the trade than I do. Besides, I have work of my own that must not be neglected."

"I will pay you well for your time, even if finally you conclude not to ride. I'll give you one thousand dollars if you will stand by me until after the race is run."

"That is ten times more than enough for the little I could do for you," quietly responded True Blue. "We'll consider the offer not made, until we are both cooler, and have taken time to think it all over."

"Look! yonder comes as great a scamp as goes unhung! Don't give him a hint of the offer you made me. I'll tell you my reasons afterward," hurriedly added True Blue, as the figure of a short, bandy-legged, squat-built man was observed approaching them.

This was Tom Craydock—"English Tom," as he was better known in racing circles—the long-trusted trainer of Henry Blythe's stables.

His red face was more than usually inflamed now, and his rat-like eyes were gleaming with a wicked fire as he drew near. He cast a sullen glare of venomous hatred at the boy jockey, then turned to Henry Blythe, with the faintest possible salute, growling:

"I've just come from the stables, which the doctor he says Little Joe'll never ride ag'in—he's a cripple for life, 'long o' that bloody beast o' yours?"

CHAPTER III.

LITTLE JOE.

"I'M sorry to hear that, Tom, and trust that matters will turn out better than you expect," said Henry Blythe, ignoring the rude address of the trainer. "But that is no reason why you

should come growling to me. You put up the boy to ride—you had charge of the filly's head—and between you, made a pretty mess of the business. Only for this gentleman, I'd have been put in the hole for good and all!"

The fellow uttered an indistinct growl, and cast another evil look toward True Blue, who was summing him up with a keen, comprehensive scrutiny.

"A dirty vagabone, as steps between honest men an' their bread! But I'll pay him out if they sends me over the water for't!"

These muttered words were hardly meant to be overheard, but True Blue had led a life that trained his hearing as well as his other senses, and with a low, careless laugh, he uttered:

"I'll be keeping the flies off of you, my beauty, while you are doing it. I'm little, but I'm a tough horse to curry, and I reckon you'll find the job interesting enough to keep you from going to sleep over it."

"Stop, Craydock!" cried Blythe, sternly, his strong hand closing firmly upon the Englishman's shoulder. "I tell you, once for all, that this young man is my particular friend, and if you try to injure him in any way, I'll put you where the dogs can't bite you."

"Not with my consent, Mr. Blythe," said True Blue, with a quiet self-confidence that made the burly trainer stare. "My hands can keep my head, and I am able to fight my own way—thanking you all the same."

"I believe it," said the veteran turfite, with an honest emphasis, as he gazed into the bold, frank countenance of the boy jockey. "Your spurs are well grown for so young a bird—but you're not going?"

"Yes; I've seen enough fun for one day."

"Well, if you must; but you will come to us this evening if only for a few minutes?"

"I'd rather not; I'd be like a fish out of water. If you like, I'll call to-morrow morning, if you will give me your address."

Henry Blythe wrote the name of his hotel upon a card, and slipped it into the hand of True Blue, together with a small roll of bank notes, saying:

"That is not the half of what I owe you, but I hope you'll take it as an earnest—" but the boy jockey interrupted him with quiet decision:

"I'll only take what I am fairly entitled to, Mr. Blythe. A mount is ten dollars—a winning mount is twenty-five; here is the balance, with many thanks."

Dropping the money into the hand of the embarrassed turfman, True Blue turned and hastened away from the spot, followed by the gaze of both men, but with widely different emotions in their hearts.

The first man whom he asked, was able to inform the boy jockey where the Glenwood (the title of Henry Blythe's breeding farm) stables were located, and thanking him, True Blue hastened thither.

His ostensible object was to secure possession of his little mustang, which had been taken to the stables by the groom, according to Blythe's orders, but the lad had another purpose in view, if it could only be carried out.

The story so briefly outlined by Henry Blythe had deeply interested him, and the more he reflected upon the matter, the stronger grew the temptation to close with the extremely liberal offer made him, if only to take charge of the gray filly until the day of the great race.

"If I do, it must be on my own terms," he mused, while nearing the stalls assigned to the Glenwood stable. "There's got to be a clean sweep made of all the dirty scoundrels that have been preying upon him, and the little beauty must be put into my hands to manage as I think best."

This sounds somewhat conceited, but the events of that afternoon were enough to justify an even greater amount of egotism, and he who does not have a good opinion of himself, runs little risk of setting the river afire.

True Blue found less difficulty in gaining his main object than he had anticipated, and five minutes later found himself standing beside a blanket-covered pile of straw, upon which lay the battered form of "Little Joe," son of English Tom, the lad who had been selected to pilot Aphrodite to victory—or defeat.

A negro lad, of about his own age, was the only other occupant of the rude stall, and his restless motions, when the bell in the judges' stand rung to call out the racers, told how little his sympathies were with the luckless lad over whom he had been set to watch. With the passion for horses and horse-racing, which seems to be a natural inheritance of his kind, he was longing to be away in the midst of the fun.

True Blue readily divined this, and promptly improved his opportunity.

"You kin go an' see this heat, Snowball, ef you'll come back as soon's it's over. I'll watch by Little Joe that long; I jest come from his father. But mind you don't stop longer than the one heat, or I'll pin back your ears an' swaller you raw!"

The broadly-grinning darkey waited for no more, but darted out of the stall, kicking up his heels and turning a summerset, by way of expressing his gratitude for being released from an uncongenial task.

Ignorant at what moment English Tom might return, and not caring about giving the ugly-dispositioned trainer a handle for fastening a quarrel upon him just at present, if it could be avoided, True Blue bent over the heavily-breathing lad and gently called him by name.

Little Joe was not asleep, as the boy jockey had believed, and opened his hollow, sunken eyes, with a look of listless curiosity.

Though still in his 'teens, his face was wizened and wrinkled as that of an old man. His limbs and body were little more than skin and bones, for, like many another noted jockey, he had been obliged to diet and drug himself constantly and severely, in order to keep his weight down to a reasonable standard. After a jockey passes eight stone, his mounts in these degenerate days of short dashes, are few and far between.

But Little Joe had past all that, now; he had scored for the last time, and if he lived, it would be as a helpless cripple.

It was not the fall from the saddle that did the harm. That was too carefully planned for such a result to follow; but as the gray filly broke away from the treacherous trainer whose strong hand had been secretly torturing her tender mouth for half an hour, several of the other high-strung racers became unmanageable for the moment, and one of them had planted both forefeet fairly upon the back of the fallen jockey.

Several ribs were broken, but the most serious injury was to the spine. Though the back was not broken, the surgeon who attended him, plainly declared that Little Joe would never walk again unless upon crutches.

For the moment it seemed almost as though instant death would have been far preferable.

"It was a judgment on me," the injured jockey said in a low, dreary tone, as True Blue bent sympathizingly over him. "That was the first time I ever tried my hand at a 'cross'—but you're a friend of his?"

"Who do you mean?" asked True Blue, openly meeting the suspicious glance of the lad.

"English Tom—the one they call my father—but they lie! He was never a father of mine! No father would have made his son a drunken, worthless dog—and then cursed and beaten him because he could not drag him down still deeper into the mire—because he could not make him a lying traitor to the man whose hand paid and fed him. I say it is a lie! He is no father of mine! And yet—he brought me to this—to a living death—and then cursed me because I failed to ruin *her*, as well as myself!"

Exhausted by this frenzied outburst, Little Joe lay panting for breath, but with the glowing fire unquenched in his sunken eyes.

True Blue held a cup of cold water to his lips, and wet the bandage around his temples, before speaking.

"So far from being a friend of English Tom's, if I could have my way, I would lynch him and all rascals who, like him, do all they can to degrade and ruin a sport that has no equal upon the face of the globe. I think I can promise you that he will have cause to regret this day's work—but let that pass.

"I suppose you know that the gray filly won the race, after all. I was lucky enough to catch her, and they put me up to ride. The extra weight told, but the little lady was all there when I called upon her at the finish, and answered the call right nobly!"

"I knew it—and so did they—curse them! Ah! man! but I loved the little lady as I could have loved my mother, if I had ever had one!" enthusiastically panted the crippled jockey.

"And yet you could plot to defeat, if not destroy her," True Blue, who idolized a good horse, could not help saying, though he bit his lip sharply the next moment.

Little Joe winced at the taunt, but did not appear to take umbrage at the plain speech.

"I did the best I could. There was a chance for her escaping with life that way—more than there was any other.

"Look here," he added, abruptly, grasping True Blue by the hand. "Promise me one thing—pledge me your sacred honor to go and tell Mr. Henry Blythe what I say, and I will expose the whole plot. Tell him to bring a lawyer to take down my words, and I will sign and swear to their truth. Will you do this?"

"I will—and right gladly," promptly replied True Blue.

This was even more than he had dared to hope for, though it was his sole object in visiting the injured lad, and the eagerness with which he listened, may be more readily imagined than described.

"I believe and will trust you. Your face is a good, honest one. I don't think you would lie to a crippler."

"I will do whatever you wish me. But if you have much to say, there's no time to lose. Your—English Tom may return at any moment, and then there would be a circus!"

"I'll make sure of one point. Tell Mr. Blythe not to let his filly stop in English Tom's charge one moment longer than he can help, unless he would have her ruined forever. If he can't spoil her chances any other way, he'll poison her himself. She'd have been meat for the crows long before this, if I hadn't consented to play the trick that has left me like this."

True Blue bent closer over the speaker, but Little Joe smiled faintly and shook his head as he read aright the doubts of his visitor.

"My brain is as clear as your own, and I am only telling you the gospel truth. Time and again I have been offered my own price if I would poison the filly, or shut my eyes while some one else did the dirty work. They knew it couldn't be done without my knowledge, for ever since her first race, I have slept in the same box with her, have fed and watered and groomed her with my own hands."

"Why should they run so much risk? If they believed she could not be beaten, why not put their money on, instead of against her?"

"Money wasn't all—they were plotting to ruin Mr. Henry Blythe—I overheard them talking one dark night, when they did not dream of my being near."

"I tried to steal away, but my foot slipped and I fell. They caught me, and thrashed me until I admitted overhearing their plans. They decided to put me in safe hiding until it would be too late for me to tell my story."

"I knew what that meant—they would drug or poison my pet—the only thing I loved upon earth—and I finally agreed to throw the race in some manner that would be less dangerous to all concerned. But as heaven hears me! I didn't mean to do it. I thought I would find a chance to tell Mr. Blythe of the plot, but they were too cunning for me. I was never left alone for a moment, and English Tom swore that at the first suspicious movement upon my part, he would give the filly a dose of the poison which he constantly carried with him."

"How could I act otherwise than I did? It was giving her a chance for life, and the other way there was none. If I sinned, I have been punished—"

"Who were the ones in the plot besides English Tom?" hastily interrupted True Blue, as he caught the sounds of approaching footsteps.

But Little Joe had exhausted his feeble strength by the vehemence with which he had spoken, and before he could make the important disclosure asked for, a burly figure darkened the entrance, and a fierce growling curse announced the return of English Tom.

CHAPTER IV.

A VILE SCHEME.

TRUE BLUE saw that he was recognized by the English bull-dog, and even without the grating curse with which Craydock greeted him, he would have known that there were breakers ahead.

Every line of the trainer's face, every muscle of his body, betokened evil to the boy jockey, and the brutal fire in his pig-like eyes told True Blue that English Tom, in his case at least, would never listen to an appeal for mercy if he once got the upper hand, until his beast-like passion was fully glutted.

Though having full confidence in his own powers, the boy jockey was strongly averse to becoming engaged in a brawl of this kind, just at that time, and resolved to "bluff" his way through the threatening difficulty, if "cheek" and assurance would do it.

His greatest fear was lest English Tom had overheard a portion of the confession made by Little Joe.

In that case he knew that the trainer, to avoid the serious consequences which would assuredly follow the bringing to light his nefarious transactions, would not lightly suffer him to escape with his dangerous knowledge. At the very least he would suffer expulsion forever from all of the race-tracks belonging to the National Association.

The first words spoken by English Tom, were not calculated to allay this suspicion.

"You won't come spyan' round here no more, blast ye! I'm goin' to mash yer blarsted—"

With his huge, shoulder-of-mutton fists doubled up, English Tom gathered himself up for a rush that would probably have made good his boasting threat, but instead of advancing, he took a step backward, raising one massive arm as though to guard his head and throat.

The black muzzle of a cocked and loaded revolver was staring him full in the face, and the bright blue eye of the boy jockey was coolly staring at him over the leveled barrel.

"Ef it's all the same to you, my beauty, I'd a leetle rather not be mashed just yit," drawled True Blue, keeping the shrinking bully covered with the silver drop, despite his uneasy shifting. "I come here on business, which don't consarn you a-tall. I've done that business, an' now I'm goin' to leave. 'F you git in my road, you'll git run over, an' as I gen'ally travel rough-shod, heel an' toe corks, the chancies is you'll git hurt. I've got the pole, an' mean to hold it, until a better critter takes it away from me—an' that critter don't run under your colrs!"

The boy jockey spoke boldly enough, and slowly advanced toward the entrance, but, though not a line of his countenance changed, he began to fear that he had more upon his hands than he could manage, when he paused upon the threshold.

English Tom had not returned to the stables

alone, though True Blue had been ignorant of the fact until this moment.

Two men had borne him company, gentlemen in outward seeming at least, though one was rather flashily dressed, with a redundancy of watch chain, rings and other jewelry.

The other was dressed in glossy black and spotless linen, bearing the unmistakable stamp of good birth and breeding. Yet True Blue instinctively felt that this ministerial appearing personage was by far the most dangerous of the trio, despite the fact that the other, the dashing "sport," was coolly covering him with a heavy chambered derringer.

True Blue's first and most natural—considering his past life and training—impulse, was to open hostilities at once, knowing as he did from experience, that the first blow, if rightly delivered, was often more than half the battle. But, fortunately for all concerned, he remembered that he was now in a law-abiding region, where an honest man could only strike in self-defense, and he suffered the muzzle of his revolver to drop a few inches, though holding it in readiness to cover any one of the trio, as the circumstances might render necessary, as he said:

"Three to one—an' that one a leetle boy as haint fa'rly got the taste of his mother's milk out o' his mouth—is long odds, but I've bucked ag'in still longer ones, an' still come under the wire fast. Drop the flag to a even start, an' I'll keep ye comp'ny long's my bellows holds out!"

Both English Tom and the flashily dressed sport looked toward their companion, the gentleman in black, as though asking whether or no they should accept this rather "horsey" defiance, and for a few moments he hesitated, his cold gray eyes fixed upon True Blue's face with a strange expression in their depths.

"If Little Joe had told me who the men were that forced him to throw the race, I could call these two men by their right names."

This was the thought that flashed through the mind of the boy jockey as he unflinchingly met that cold, stern gaze. It came upon him like a revelation, and he would have staked his life upon the truth of the unspoken words. But nothing of this was suffered to show itself upon his face, and the gentleman in black appeared to be satisfied as he averted his eyes.

"Put up your weapon, Holman," he said, in a cold, unpleasant voice. "You are too ready to meddle with other people's quarrels. If English Tom and you, fellow," he added, turning abruptly upon True Blue, "have any differences, settle them between yourselves, and don't try to drag gentlemen into the matter, simply because they chance to be passing by at the time."

A sharp retort was on the tip of the boy jockey's tongue, but, with rare prudence for him, he swallowed it unspoken. He had too much at stake for him to run any unnecessary risks.

"You cain't blame me fer thinkin' you two was in cahoots with yender overgrown bulldog, when I see one o' ye draw a pistol to back him up," was his only remark, as he turned toward the negro boy, who just then returned, and asked him to show him where his mustang was stabled.

True Blue, though usually preferring to wait upon himself, did not do so upon this occasion, but kept his eyes about him while the darkey saddled and bridled his horse.

He felt sure that English Tom would not rest content under the repulse he had received, and past experience had taught him not to despise any foe, however low and contemptible.

"He'll wait ten years for a chance when my back is turned, if it don't come sooner," he muttered, beneath his breath. "If this had only happened out in the mountains—"

The hiatus was peculiarly significant, and formed a strong if silent compliment to the majesty of the law.

True Blue's precaution was not entirely unrewarded, since he saw the two gentlemen enter one of the adjoining stables, whither English Tom shortly after followed them.

Mounting his mustang, the boy jockey rode slowly past the open door of the stable in question, and though he did not turn his head in that direction, he caught a glimpse of the trio, out of the tail of his eye, apparently conversing together with unusual earnestness.

"They'd be sure to notice me," he muttered, as he rode on, "or I'd try to get another word with Little Joe. I'd like to learn their names, and know for certain if they are the ones who are plotting against the old gentleman. But I'll see him again to-morrow."

Consoling himself with this thought, which was fated never to be realized, True Blue crossed the track and patiently waited until the racing was over for the day, though the sport had suddenly lost its strong fascination for him.

He joined in the shouts and cheers of the enthusiastic multitude, but it was mechanically. His mind was busied with other and more important matters.

With the crowd, he turned away and left the grounds, his mind made up as to the course he should pursue for the next two weeks, provided Henry Blythe did not alter his mind in regard to placing the gray filly, Aphrodite, under his care.

After much thought, he believed that the work to which he had solemnly dedicated his young life, could be carried on at the same time with his new duties.

"He has spent the best part of his life upon the turf. He is one of those men who know and are known by everybody. Maybe he can tell me where I can find Tracy Talbot—"

The reflections of the boy jockey came to a sudden termination at this point.

A fine landau rolled swiftly past him, drawn by a dashing span of blood-bays. The vehicle contained four persons. Upon the front seat sat Henry Blythe, engaged in eager conversation with another gentleman of about the same age with himself. Opposite sat Cora Blythe, with a tall, handsome young man, whose face was bent down close to hers—a face in which far duller eyes than those of the boy jockey might easily read an ardent, overpowering love for the dainty creature who looked up so shyly into his speaking eyes.

Just one glance; but it was enough for True Blue to see all this. And as the vision swept by, he felt a strange gnawing pain at his heart that almost terrified him—it was so new to his experience.

He laughed sharply, and tossed back a lock of hair that had escaped from his outlandish head-dress; but he could not laugh away that unaccustomed pain.

Though as yet ignorant of the fact, the boy jockey was now experiencing his first bitter pang of jealousy!

With a listless weariness such as he had rarely felt, True Blue alighted at the stable where he put up his horse, then passed on to his hotel. It was one of the most fashionable ones in the city, where high prices ruled, and the last where one would suppose a lad of True Blue's dress and apparent poverty would take up his abode for any length of time. But he had not decided without due forethought. This hotel was the favorite resort of turfites of the better class, and for that very reason he had chosen to stop there, since he had good reason to believe that through this class alone could he hope to accomplish the task upon which he had staked his entire future life.

The office was crowded with eagerly talking men, all discussing the sensational race of the day, but True Blue did not pause to note their comments. Unnoticed by any save the obviously grinning porter who, until this half-holiday, had looked loftily down upon the rough-and-ready youth who traveled without any baggage to speak of. Sambo, like many another lover of sport socially his superior, had placed his money upon the gray filly, and could but respect the hand that pulled it out of the fire for him.

True Blue did not wait to hear the honest darkey's well-meant congratulations, but brushed past him and ran lightly up the stairs to his own room.

The door was locked, though this fact did not appear to surprise him, until after his repeated knockings and rattling of the door-knob, failed to elicit any sound from within. Raising his voice, he cried sharply:

"Dan, old man! what's come over you? Why don't you open up, and not make me stand here all night?"

"Sure an' is it raaly you, master dear?" uttered a weak, quavering voice from within the chamber.

"Who else would it be, using my sweet voice, Danny?" laughed the boy jockey, but there was a trace of impatience in his tones as he added: "Open the dure, daddy, or never a sup o' the craythur 'll ye taste this night!"

Either through fear lest this threat should be carried out, or because he fully recognized the speaker, the person called Danny, turned the key in the lock and suffered True Blue to push wide the door. But the instant he stepped into the room, Danny slammed the door shut and locked it.

An old man long before his time was Daniel Clark. His face was deeply seamed and terribly scarred. His hair was white as snow. His huge frame was bowed and bent, as though beneath the weight of a long century, and he trembled in every limb as though suffering from a severe attack of the ague.

And yet, only a few years before the date of our story, you must have searched long and far before finding a finer specimen of the purely animal man than was bold Dan Clark. A giant in size and strength, with a heart that literally knew no fear, a face that was rarely handsome, despite the lack of culture or anything more than purely brute intelligence; such was he then. Now—prematurely broken down, his iron nerves shattered, a blind and almost helpless cripple!

"What's the matter wi' ye, daddy?" uttered True Blue, soothingly. "Sure an' ye know that no harm kin crass yer four bones while your own b'y's to the fore! Tell me the matter that troubles ye, honey, darlint."

As a mother soothes her wailing child in its own broken patois, so True Blue took the "burr on his tongue" as he strove to reassure his agitated companion.

"The devil is here—undher the same ruff wid

us two!" whispered Danny, creeping closer to the boy jockey. "He went past the dure jist the least taste afore you kin back. I h'ard him spake as plain as I hear me own tongue this minute that's over us!"

"Not that man—not Tracy Talbot?" demanded True Blue, his voice unsteady with strong emotion.

"That same, honey! An' I dr'amend of a white goat, last night, worse luck! No—I'll not let ye go—he'll kill ye this time, wid his own hand to make sure—"

With an impatient force, True Blue broke away from the trembling hands that clasped his knees, and unlocking the door, rushed swiftly down the stairs and into the office.

It was no easy task, but he did manage to school his features so that little of the fierce passions that agitated his heart could be read upon his face.

Pressing through the crowd, he began carefully examining the huge register, in hopes of finding the name of the man whom he had solemnly vowed to hunt down, though the search should consume a lifetime.

But this hope was not fulfilled. Page after page was searched, without success. Either Tracy Talbot was not a guest of that hotel, or else he was registered under another name.

When he had searched through all of the entries for the current month, True Blue resolved to try another plan, and waiting until he could catch the eye of the busy hotel clerk, he addressed him:

"Can you tell me where I can find a gentleman by the name of Tracy Talbot?"

The high and mighty official stared at the boy jockey as though amazed by his temerity, but managed to utter:

"Never had the honor of the gent's acquaintance."

But one at least among the crowd appeared to be not a little interested in the matter.

Drawing out of the press, he hurriedly wrote a few words upon the back of one of the hotel cards, then slipped the message, with a bank-note, into the porter's hand, and pointing out the boy jockey, ran swiftly up the stairs.

Not a little perplexed, True Blue took the card, but a sharp exclamation parted his lips as he read:

"If you wish to find Tracy Talbot, come up-stairs to room 76."

There was no signature; only those few words.

CHAPTER V.

CORNERED.

ONLY those few words, but they were enough. Without pausing to reason or deliberate, True Blue sprung rapidly up the long flight of stairs and never paused until he stood before the door of room No. 76, his knuckles rapping sharply against the barrier.

The summons was not immediately answered, and True Blue could hear a subdued murmur as of voices in earnest conversation, though these sounds abruptly ceased a moment after.

Then the door was opened, and the occupant stood aside with a low bow.

True Blue promptly accepted this mute invitation to enter, and the door was quickly closed behind him, while the key turned in the lock with a sharp snap.

Until this instant the boy jockey had not entertained the faintest suspicion that the message delivered him was aught other than genuine, or that it was the bait to a snare cunningly, if hastily, laid for him.

But as he heard the key turned in and then withdrawn from the lock, he felt that there was mischief brewing, and instantly stood upon his guard.

Remembering the muffled voices he had heard, the boy jockey cast a keen, swift glance around the room, but to all appearance he and the man who stood coolly leaning back against the closed door, were the only occupants of the apartment.

With his suspicions augmented rather than allayed by this fact, True Blue gave a swift, sidelong leap that carried him to the wall near one corner of the room, thus effectually guarding his back, and confronted the man who had given him admittance, a cocked and leveled revolver in his hand.

At that moment the boy jockey recognized the man who had apparently entrapped him. It was none other than the dashing sport whom the gentleman in black had addressed as Holman, a few hours earlier.

As he made this discovery, True Blue drew a long breath of relief, for he believed he comprehended the whole affair, and if so, it was far less serious than he had at first imagined.

In a clear, measured tone of voice he uttered:

"You want to open up, boss, or I'll make a gay old spotter pictur' on that door ahind your head. I'm so p'izen tender raised I al'ays ketch cold in a room which the key is turned in the lock. An' when I do ketch cold, I'm the durndest critter to git up on my ear an' bu'st things wide open you ever see! Don't you think you'd better open up, boss?"

A hot flush passed over the gambler's face, leaving it white and wicked looking. It was a

bitter pill to swallow for one of his temperament, and for an instant it seemed as though he was about to refuse—to leap upon his quick-witted antagonist and dare his fire, rather than submit.

But this feeling was of brief duration. He knew that the odds were too greatly against him, desperate gamester though he was. He had studied human nature too long and carefully not to see that the boy jockey was in deadly earnest, despite his somewhat whimsical speech. He saw "shoot" in the lad's eyes, and knew that his only hope lay in obeying promptly.

He grasped the knob and turned it, his eyes opening wide in admirably simulated astonishment as the door resisted his efforts to open it.

"Well, that beats me!" he ejaculated, turning his face toward True Blue, with a faint smile. "I believe the door is locked. The key must have turned of its own accord, though I never knew of its doing the like before."

"Satan does git into things, sometimes," grinned the boy jockey, amused by the fellow's impudence. "F you'll be so kind as to step over by the table, yender, mebbe I kin take the hoodoo out o' the pesky thing."

The gambler did as directed, without a word, and the boy jockey unlocked the door, slipping the key into his pocket, careful to keep one eye upon Holman. But the latter worthy was apparently resigned to the course matters were taking, and dropping into a chair beside the table, struck a match and lighted a cigar.

While thus watching his adversary, True Blue made another discovery. Directly opposite was a second door, which he knew must open into another room.

He was well enough acquainted with the building to feel confident that there was no other outlet to the inner chamber, and he knew that the owner of the second voice which he had heard, while in the passage-way, must be still inside that room.

This fact, together with the faint hope that there might be some truth in the gambler's message, decided him as to the course he should pursue.

Pushing a chair up near the table, and seating himself so that he could command both the gambler and the inner door, he tossed the card which had drawn him thither, across the table, saying:

"What kin you tell me about the man whose name is writ' on that bit o' pasteboard?"

"What is it you wish to know about him?" evasively uttered the gambler, closely eying the boy jockey.

"All that you kin tell me," was the prompt reply. "You axed me to come up here, of your own a'cord, but I won't take no advantage o' that. Ef you kin tell me what I want to know, I'll pay ye your own price, so long's you don't oversize my pile. Or better yit—set me down face to face with Tracy Talbot. Do that, an' I'll pay the figger you ax, ef I hev to work my fingers down to the last knuckle a-scrapin' of it together!"

These words were spoken with an earnestness that could not be mistaken. The boy jockey meant every word he uttered, and as he saw this, the eyes of the gambler filled with an exultant fire.

There was always a trace of *diablerie* in the handsome face of Frank Holman, but never did this show more plainly than at this moment, when he believed he saw the fruits of the difficult and dangerous game which he was playing, hanging fairly within his grasp.

"I will bring you face to face with Tracy Talbot, and it shall not cost you one cent of money, either," he uttered, slowly, his great, lustrous black eyes fixed upon the face of the boy jockey.

At these words, True Blue felt as though an icicle had been thrust down his back, but so perfect was his self-control, that the keen-eyed gambler suspected nothing.

"I ain't quite a fool," slowly said the youth. "I know that a man in these days don't turn his back on a offer o' honest money, unless that's somethin' else he values higher an' wants a heap wuss. Now, you say you'll put me face to face with the man I'm lookin' fer but you won't take no money in pay. Jest a bit back I give you a bluff that wouldn't taste sweet in any man's mouth. I know you hain't fergotten it so soon, nur you ain't one o' them angel-on-airth critters you read about, as pays a man back in doughnuts fer peltin' of you with brick-bats. Not much! Then spit it out! What is it you want me to do that's wuth more to you than money?"

Despite his natural audacity and plentiful supply of self-assurance, Frank Holman was not a little taken aback by this blunt speech. He saw that he had no common lad to deal with, and the coveted fruit seemed to hang a little higher than a moment since.

"You are too quick in jumping at conclusions, my friend," he said, quietly, admirably concealing his secret misgivings. "Though I was in sober earnes' when I said that it should not cost you a cent, I never meant to infer that I did not expect to be paid, and paid largely, for the trouble I might be put to in keeping my pledge. I expect to fill both of my pockets, with

your aid. If I don't, that will be my look-out, not yours, and in either case, you shall see your man within four and twenty hours after your work is done. Is it a bargain?"

"I kin tell better after I know what that work is."

"Simply to ride a horse in the big race next month—for the Washington Cup, you know."

"It's your hoss, I reckon?" asked True Blue, a little puzzled by the turn the affair was taking. It was so different from what he had been expecting, after such a long preamble and cautious leading up to the point.

"Well—no," hesitated Holman, changing his position and covertly watching the boy jockey out of the tail of his eye. "I'd ask nothing better, if you only rode a few pounds lighter. But even with your really remarkable skill as an offset, the extra weight would be too great a handicap over the Cup course of two miles and a half."

"No; I want you to ride the gray filly Aphrodite."

"But I thought she b'longed to old Blythe?"

True Blue said this with a gravity that was highly commendable, considering the fact that he was heartily laughing in his sleeve at the strange coincidence. Two parties, bitter rivals upon the turf, at least, seeking to engage his services for the great race—and both of them wishing him to ride the same animal!

"So she does," promptly rejoined Holman. "Now I'll be honest and above-board with you. I own the black gelding *Midnight*, and mean to run him in that race. I believe he is sure to win, and have backed him for all that I am worth—and a good deal more. In fact, unless he *does* win, I'm bu'sted so wide open that salt won't save me! Still, the filly is a rare good'un, and by a scratch she might come under the wire first—unless she was ridden by some one who could keep cool and not lose his head at the critical moment. You understand?"

"Waal, no—I cain't jest say I do," was the thoughtful response. "I reckon you'd better putt it a leetle plainer, then thar won't be no fear o' mistakes. I'm ruther slow at ketchin' a idee, but when I do git a holt, I hang on to it like a old maid to her fust offer."

"You're less of a fool than you try to make me believe," said Holman, with a short, unpleasant laugh; "but I'll face my cards if you like."

"I know that old Blythe has already made you an offer to ride his filly for the Cup. I want you to accept his proposal. And as soon as the race is over, come to me and I will perform my part of the bargain—provided the filly is not under the wire first."

"In so many words, you want me to 'pull' the filly?" said True Blue, his eyes beginning to kindle. "I know both of the critters as well as ef I'd bin raised atween 'em, an' I know that the filly kin give your hoss ten pounds, an' leave him on the wrong side o' the flag over that len'th o' ground, if so be she's rid' by any one as understands his business."

"I don't mean anything of the kind. I am willing you should let the filly do her level best. All I stipulate for is this: Let her do her own running; don't help her any; let her feel your weight. You can ride twenty pounds heavier than the scales show, if you let yourself be a dead, lifeless weight, and that will cook her goose more surely than the most skillful pulling, besides being far less dangerous, since no one can possibly tell that you are not doing your level best to carry her under the wire first of all."

"That's the whole thing in a nut-shell. Simply go through the necessary motions, but let her do all the work, and when the race is over, come to me for your pay."

"An' of course I'd get it. You wouldn't go back on me a'ter I'd done my part. You're too hon'rable fer that. You wouldn't look at me like I was crazy, an' tell me to go to the devil an' shake myself. Oh, no! Blamed ef I don't b'lieve you think I'm a p'izen fool than you be—an' that's needless!"

It seemed as though True Blue was trying to let the gambler down easy. The first few words were spoken in a tone of trustful simplicity, which soon changed to one of injured doubt, while the final sentence was uttered with a contemptuous disgust that could not be mistaken, as he flung aside all disguise.

But the fall was none the less severe and humiliating, as Holman suddenly realized that he had been fooled to the top of his bent—that he was the simple tool instead of the master-workman he had fancied.

But he made one more effort to retrieve the game.

"I will give you any pledge that you may require. I will write down the information you require, and sealing it up, place it in a lawyer's hands with instructions to deliver it to you, on the day after the race, provided my horse wins. Will that do?"

"No; it won't do. I wouldn't trust you as fur as a canary bird could throw a dead bull by the tail. I jest let you run on to see how p'izen mean a thing could crawl into the shape of a man. An' now I've found out, I'd ruther live on over-ripe aigs all my life then to

hev' any furder dealin's with sech a all-fired—Cool an' easy, boss!"

Sharp and clear the last words were uttered as Frank Holman, his face fairly convulsed with rage and mortification, started up from his seat with a grating curse, as though he would spring upon his taunting adversary.

A swift bound carried True Blue to the door, where he faced about with his trusty revolver in his hand, a laughing devil in his bright blue eye.

It was not the fear of what Frank Holman might do, that caused the boy jockey to act thus. But even as the gambler arose to his feet, the door behind him was flung open, and the form of a tall man stood in the opening, his face stern and menacing.

As True Blue had more than half suspected, the concealed listener was none other than the gentleman in black.

"Whistle in your English bulldog, now, an' let the performance begin!" cried the boy jockey, with a mocking laugh.

"Put up your pistol, young man," coldly uttered the new-comer. "Enough is as good as a feast. You will get into trouble some of these days, unless you learn more prudence in handling dangerous weapons. You are too headstrong to be allowed to run at large, and I'd only be doing my duty if I were to give you in charge."

"You won't do that while my tongue is loose. Thar'd be music in the air ef I should tell o' the offer you two made me just now."

"And who do you suppose would believe your word against ours?" contemptuously. "Besides, Holman was only trying you. Instead of his owning *Midnight*, we neither of us have a dollar interested in him. What little money we have at stake, is placed upon the filly, *Aphrodite*, the property of my cousin, Henry Blythe. The mock offer was made you, simply to see if there was any risk of our losing our money through your selling, or being willing to sell the race."

These words were spoken with a quiet candor that seemed born of truth and conscious rectitude. If they were lies, then the gentleman in black was an adept in the art of making black appear white.

"Then he was lyin' about Tracy Talbot, too?"

"What do you know about Tracy Talbot? What are you seeking him for?"

"Cause he's my long-lost gran'mother," grinned True Blue.

"If you really know anything about him, you can easily guess where to look for him, when I say that he died nearly six years ago," laughed the tall man.

"That's a p'izen lie! Tracy Talbot was in this very house not more'n two hours ago!"

CHAPTER VI.

TRUE BLUE'S LITTLE GAME.

TRUE BLUE did not wait to observe the effect of his defiant shot, but, deeming discretion the better part of valor under the circumstances, quickly placed the door between himself and his two adversaries.

He was not followed, as he half-expected would be the case, and was once more forcibly reminded of the fact that he was now living in a civilized, law-abiding land, where a more dangerous weapon than one's tongue was rarely wielded.

"A man mebbe 'll live longer," he muttered, with a sniff of disgust, as he waited in vain for his enemies to show up. "But it takes the biggest half o' the spice out o' livin', a'ter all!"

The boy jockey lay awake late that night after he went to bed, for he had much to think about and study over. And before his eyes closed in slumber, he had made a decision that was to prove the most important of his entire life.

His reflections were about equally divided between his personal affairs and those more nearly concerning Henry Blythe.

To his mind, that interview with Frank Holman strongly confirmed the statement made by Little Joe that secret enemies were persistently plotting the ruin of the veteran turfite, and he resolved to do all he could to baffle their plans.

"I'll ride the filly, if he'll give me the mount. I can bring my weight down to one-fifteen in the time, by hard training, and if no harm comes to the little lady in the meantime, there 'll be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth in the enemy's camp when the sun goes down on that day."

Having arrived at this conclusion, True Blue composed himself to sleep, and wearied with the unusual excitement of the past day, he slept long and heavily. Nor would he have awakened when he did, had not the old cripple aroused him, in great agitation, declaring that he had just heard the voice of Tracy Talbot, passing their door.

True Blue leaped out of bed and opened the door, but the corridor was empty. If Danny had not been mistaken, then Tracy Talbot had got out of the way with marvelous rapidity.

Directly after breakfast, True Blue left the house and started for the hotel where Henry Blythe had apartments. But his rapid footsteps

soon grew slower, and he seemed ill at ease, as he more than once cast a dubious glance down at his free and easy attire.

"It just suits the mountains and the plains," he muttered, a little regretfully, as he looked around for a ready-made clothing store; "but after all, it does make one look like a traveling circus, in the city. The old gentleman might not like having a wild boy asking after him."

Not a word of the young lady, yet it may seriously be doubted whether the boy jockey would have given his dress a second thought if he had not entertained a secret hope that he would meet Cora Blythe as well as her father.

An hour later, he stood in the presence of Henry Blythe, new rigged out from top to toe, and though he felt a little stiff and ill at ease in his new dress, the change had wonderfully improved his appearance.

"Well, sir," said Mr. Blythe, after a cordial salutation, and motioning the boy jockey to be seated. "I trust you have made up your mind to accept my offer—"

"I have a good deal to tell you first, Mr. Blythe," hastily interrupted True Blue. "I have learned a great deal since we parted, and after you hear the whole story, you may change your plans."

Begging the old gentleman to hear him through without interruption, the boy jockey, briefly as possible, detailed the substance of his interview with Little Joe, laying particular stress upon the injured lad's desire to have his confession put in writing and duly witnessed.

"I feel sure that he spoke no more than the truth," added True Blue, as Henry Blythe arose and paced the floor in great excitement. "If I had entertained any doubts, they would have been put at rest by what happened last night. But before I tell you that, let me ask if you have a cousin in this place?"

Henry Blythe nodded, a strange expression coming upon his countenance.

"A tall, middle-aged man, who dresses and looks like a preacher?" added True Blue.

The old gentleman gave a short, disagreeable laugh.

"The devil in God's livery—that's my highly respectable and dearly-beloved cousin, James Hudson—yes!"

"Then I can speak out plainly, without fear of hurting your feelings," said the boy jockey, with a breath of relief. "Do you know whether he has any interest in *Midnight* or any other of the horses entered for the *Washington Cup*?"

"It may be, if he thought he could spite me or do me an injury in any way. But he never used to have any thing to do with the turf, unless he kept it very secret. It was too costly an amusement for him; so he used to say, when bewailing *my* infatuation, though, if the truth was told, he has always been quite as strong an admirer of the green as I—only my passion was for the green turf, while he preferred the cloth of green."

"That is, a gambler?"

Henry Blythe nodded, and his lips parted as if to say more, but if such had been his intention, he altered his mind before the words were spoken.

True Blue was quick-witted enough to see that the subject was a particularly disagreeable one to his companion, and so bridled his curiosity to learn more of the man who had so positively told him that Tracy Talbot was dead years ago.

As briefly as he could without omitting any important particulars, he detailed his recent interview with Frank Holman.

He was frequently interrupted by the old gentleman, whose angry excitement culminated when True Blue described the entrance of James Hudson upon the scene.

"The lying hypocrite!" he exclaimed, with a supplemental word that sounded very like an oath. "Dearly as he loves money—and he would sell his soul for a shilling if he could find any one fool enough to pay the price—I believe he would starve before he could bring himself to place a dollar where it could only be won by an event that would benefit me. I would be willing to swear that he has not put a dollar on my filly—to the contrary, I firmly believe that I have covered ten thousand dollars of his money, in one lump, I betting three to five that Aphrodite wins the cup."

"You don't know it's his bet, then?" asked True Blue, a little puzzled.

"No; an up-town lawyer came to me and stated that one of his clients had directed him to invest the money against my filly, at those odds, and I accommodated him. One of the conditions was that the full amount must be deposited in a certain bank, twenty days before the race. Though this was an unusual precaution, between gentlemen, I probably should have thought little about it, only from a few words that Alfred—my worthy cousin's son—carelessly let fall in my hearing."

"I believe from the bottom of my heart that Holman was in sober earnest when he made you that proposal, and that he was acting as the agent of Jim Hudson. He knows that unless my nomination pulls off this race, I am irretrievably ruined. I believe that his money bought over my trainer, English Tom, and

that my long streak of bad luck on the turf was brought about by his hand—curse him!"

"Now you will understand why I wished you to hear me out before you said anything more about that offer," said True Blue, after a short pause, for the purpose of allowing the old gentleman to expend a portion of his suffocating rage. "It's going to be a job that will require a cool and experienced head to win safely through the snags. The filly will have to be watched night and day, by those whom money cannot corrupt, nor fear intimidate, for, if your cousin is the man you believe, and hates you as you say, he will not let this chance of ruining you pass by unimproved.

"There is one way I thought of last night, by which you might save yourself, even if the filly did lose."

"You mean by 'hedging'?"

"Yes. By means of a trusty agent, you could easily put enough money against the filly to make it an even thing whether she won or lost the race."

"Would you do it, were you in my place?"

True Blue hesitated for a moment before he replied:

"If I had a daughter dependent upon me, I would; not if I was alone. I would fight them with their own weapons, and neither ask nor give quarter."

"And that is exactly what I intend doing. I haven't got money enough to pay my honest debts, and my only chance of getting out of the hole lies in winning this race. If all goes well with the filly, I *will* win it. But I want you to help me, and stand by me until it is all over with."

"I'll do that, and gladly; but you mustn't forget that I am only a boy, after all."

"But a boy whom I would rather trust than any man I know," warmly cried the impulsive old gentleman. "I don't know why it is—I may be superstitious—but somehow I feel as though you are fated to be the means of pulling me out of the mire."

"But never mind that, now. Here is an agreement which I drew up and signed this morning, before you came in. In it I offer you one thousand dollars to take charge of my filly, and either find a rider, or ride her yourself in this race for the cup, the money to be yours, whether you win or lose. If you *do* win, though there is nothing of this in the contract; you must trust my word for its fulfillment—you may name your own reward, and I pledge you my honor that it shall be yours, without a murmur on my part."

At these words a wild thrill shot through the veins of the boy jockey. He remembered a story he had once read in which a similar promise was given and redeemed, though the reward asked was the hand of a young maiden. What if—but then he choked down the daring thought, and blushed hotly at his own presumption.

"You have made the contract too one-sided," he said, after a brief pause. "I will accept the charge if you will pay my legitimate expenses. If I lose the race, I will ask nothing more; if I win, I will take the thousand dollars, and, perhaps ask a favor of you besides. That amount would not insure my faithfulness, in case I should be disposed to play the traitor, and I'd rather not take pay for work that I may not be able to perform."

"I pledge you my word of honor—all I have in this world to value and be proud of—to guard your interests as though they were my own. But there must be no half-confidence upon your side. I will always be ready to give a good reason for my actions, and you must trust me in all or nothing. If you agree to this—to place the filly in my hands, to manage as I believe best—there is my hand on the bargain."

Without the slightest hesitation Henry Blythe grasped the extended hand and wrung it warmly. Always a creature of impulse, he placed his sole hope—the one thing that stood between him and disgrace, dishonor and utter ruin—into the hands of a boy whom he was a perfect stranger to four-and-twenty hours ago. And this without any other security save the simple word of the stranger.

True Blue felt this simple confidence most deeply. To him it was a bond far more powerful than any that could be formed with pen and ink. And he mentally vowed that Henry Blythe should never have the slightest cause to regret his impulsive action.

"That much is settled, then," he said, with an air of relief. "The next thing is to look after Little Joe. If he can swear to the parties who bribed English Tom, we will have a hold upon them that will put an end to all danger from that source, at least. I only hope that my suspicions are correct—that your cousin is one of the rascals."

"If he is, and I can get plain proof of the fact, I will drive him out of the country, or make him the scorn and contempt of all honest men!" cried Blythe, with a vengeful laugh.

Though True Blue asked no questions, he felt a strong curiosity to know the cause of this strange and bitter enmity between the cousins, while the son of the one was still upon intimate and friendly terms with the other.

Henry Blythe did not give him time to ponder long over the enigma, for he asked him to step down to the stables and give orders for his team to be hitched up, while he himself started off in quest of a lawyer friend, whom he wished to take down Little Joe's statement in ship-shape fashion.

The boy jockey gave a rueful glance at his new garments as he left the hotel. They felt stiffer and more uncomfortable than ever, as he recalled his easy-fitting flannel and buck-skin. He almost regretted having made the investment—but not quite.

As he raised his eyes, he beheld Cora Blythe before him, a doubting look in her childlike eyes, which changed to a bright smile as she recognized the boy jockey in his new guise. A pleasant good-morning—a touch of the dainty gloved hand—and then she tripped lightly up the hotel steps. That was all, but True Blue ceased to regret his sacrifice, and carried that bright glance in his heart for the rest of the day.

Almost as soon as the team was ready, Henry Blythe and an elderly gentleman whom he introduced as Mr. Grey, made their appearance, and seating themselves in the carriage, were driven rapidly out to the race grounds.

But little was said, owing to the presence of the driver, who had been recently hired, for Blythe was learning the necessity of prudence, though rather late in life.

Bidding the driver await their coming, the trio left the carriage at some little distance from the stables, and hastened at once to the stall where Little Joe had lain.

Had, but was not now!

"Dey done tuck him off in a kerridge las' night, boss," was the answer made by the negro lad, when questioned.

CHAPTER VII.

"A BRUSH."

OUR friends stared at each other blankly at this totally unexpected announcement. It was a move which they had not anticipated, and one that threatened to checkmate them at the very beginning of the game.

True Blue was particularly annoyed, and disposed to take all of the blame upon his own shoulders.

"I thought at the time that he had overheard a portion, if not the whole, of what Little Joe told me. I might have known they wouldn't give us a second chance like that. If I'd only stuck by him, and sent somebody else after you!" he exclaimed, disgustedly.

"It may not be so bad, after all," suggested Mr. Grey. "The father may have taken him to some hospital, where he could receive better treatment."

"The Lord help him if any harm has come to the filly!" grated the boy jockey, a new fear assailing him.

If indeed English Tom and his confederates had overheard Little Joe denouncing their nefarious plot, as seemed highly probable, not only from their conduct on the day just past, but from their perilous haste in removing the lad almost before the nature and extent of his injuries were ascertained, nothing was more likely than that they would make sure of their game, before any decisive steps could be taken to foil them.

And this is exactly what would have been done, only for an unusual degree of forethought upon Henry Blythe's part.

The confident assertion of the boy jockey, just before the race was run on the preceding day, that groom, rider and trainer were doing all they could to insure the filly's losing the race, had set him to thinking, and the doubts thus awakened, were strengthened by the observations of several of his friends who also had noticed how injudiciously the animal was being handled.

The consequence was that before he left the grounds, Henry Blythe had placed an old and faithful negro body-servant on guard over the filly, with strict orders to allow no person to have access to her box, under any pretext whatever.

"I told old Pharaoh to shoot, if they pressed him too close after being warned," added Blythe, as he finished the explanation given above. "While he is alive, or until I relieve him from duty, the filly is as safe as though I was watching her myself."

"There's Craydock now—hillock!" he shouted, as the ungainly form of his trainer made its appearance at some little distance.

The loud summons was a needless expenditure of breath, for English Tom was only too ready for the encounter, and had been nursing his angry passions for hours.

After so long a season of almost unbroken success in his rascalities, he could ill brook defeat. He had laid his plans so carefully that he had not for a moment dreamed of failure. It was his last bold *coup*, the crowning effort of his life. Success meant a comfortable competence; and he knew that he would have succeeded only for the intervention of True Blue.

His son was crippled, the golden opportunity was lost; his lucrative situation was imperiled if not forfeited; nor was that all.

He had caught enough of the conversation between True Blue and Little Joe to know that the disabled jockey had, or was about to, denounce him and his confederates.

His first impulse was to rush upon the meddlesome youth, and forever put it out of his power to make them any further trouble. But the pistol of the boy jockey, and the calmer judgment of James Hudson, checked him for the time being.

"Even if the boy has betrayed us," Hudson was saying when True Blue rode past the stall in which they had sought refuge, "there is little harm done, provided we act promptly. Our united oaths will easily outweigh the bare assertion of this stranger, provided he is unable to produce Little Joe as his authority. You must see to that, Craydock. He must be removed this evening, before Blythe can get at him. I know a place where he can be safely kept until the danger blows over."

This plan was duly carried out, and having placed Little Joe where his tongue could work them no more hurt, English Tom hastened back to the stables, where he met with a still more serious check in the guise of old Pharaoh, the giant negro, who stood guard over the close box in which stood the gray filly.

When the negro quietly but firmly told him that he also was included in the strict orders given by Mr. Blythe, English Tom almost suffocated with rage. He knew now that the game was up, so far as it concerned his position as trainer, and could he have gained access to her, the gray filly would never have seen the light of another day. But he was bidden stand back at the muzzle of a loaded revolver, and he obeyed, for there was a quiet resolution in the old negro's face that spoke louder than words.

English Tom had drank freely during that night and morning, and when word reached him that Henry Blythe was at the stables, he started for the spot in a dangerous mood, feeling that he had nothing more to lose, and promising himself at least a foretaste of revenge.

But the moment he recognized True Blue, he forgot all else. To him he attributed all that had gone wrong, and began cursing the boy jockey, up hill and down, with a fierce hatred that, for the time being, overcame his natural slowness of speech.

Mr. Grey stood in open-eyed astonishment, and Henry Blythe was almost equally taken aback, though he quickly recovered himself and attempted to check the foul torrent of blasphemy that was rolling from the tongue of the half-crazed drunkard.

But he might as well have attempted to extinguish a fire by pouring oil upon the flames. The only effect produced by his words was to turn the flood of abuse and curses upon himself.

More than that, infuriated still more by the attempted interruption, English Tom clenched his fist and aimed a wicked blow at the face of the old gentleman. But the stroke was arrested midway, and the fellow found his arms pinioned and he held helpless as a child.

"Say de wud maussa, an' I bu'st in he ribs, fo' suah!" uttered the deep tones of old Pharaoh, who, hearing the disturbance, had rushed forward just in time to save his master from the impending blow.

"Keep your hold, old man, but don't hurt him more than you can help," interposed the boy jockey, before Blythe could speak; then, turning to the latter, he added:

"This is my quarrel, Mr. Blythe, and I ask you to let me settle it after my own fashion. The fellow needs a lesson, and will not be satisfied unless he gets it. I think I can satisfy him in about ten minutes."

"But how? Remember, you are not in the mountains, now," said the old gentleman, with a half smile.

"So much the better for him, or his foul words would have rotted with his carcass. But I didn't mean to waste good powder and lead upon such poor game. I'll read him a lesson out of his own book, if you will all agree to stand quietly by, and not interfere."

"You don't mean to fight him with your fists?" cried Blythe in amazement, adding in a whisper: "Don't think of such a foolish thing! He is always fighting, nor do I believe he has ever been whipped. He is twice your size and weight—"

"Which makes him a big mark and so much the more easily hit," laughed True Blue. "Don't you borrow trouble on my account. I've taken lessons in the 'manly art,' and have got away with many a better man than ever stood in that fellow's shoes."

"You can see for yourself that he will never be satisfied without a 'turn up,' sooner or later, and it might as well be gotten over with at once."

English Tom, still held powerless by the gigantic negro, listened to this conversation with curiously mingled feelings. He was staggered a little by the cool confidence with which the boy jockey spoke, but still believed it to be only youthful boasting, and it was with a ferocious joy that he finally heard Mr. Blythe yield to the urgently expressed wishes of the lad.

"Let him loose, old man," said True Blue to Pharaoh; "but stand by to take him in tow

again if he tries to run away before he has taken his medicine."

English Tom uttered a low, disagreeable laugh at this gibe. As well expect a hungry dog to run from a well-meated bone!

A noted bruiser in the old country, before he took to the race-course for a living, he had found plenty of chances to indulge in his favorite amusement since crossing the water, and often declared that he was a better man to-day than ever before. Really believing this assertion, he could not entirely suppress his exultation at the idea of thus easily and speedily securing his revenge upon the most hated of all his enemies.

But then came doubt—the natural suspicion of a low, degraded and uncultivated mind. The boy would not dare to meet him upon even ground. At the first advantage gained by him—English Tom—he would be set upon by the others and robbed of the fruits of his victory.

True Blue read this suspicion in the fellow's inflamed eyes, and with a short laugh turned to Mr. Blythe.

"I ask you to promise for yourself and the others, that not a finger shall be raised to interfere between him and I, until one or the other of us shall cry enough. If interrupted now, it will only have to be begun over again, perhaps at a less convenient time and place. You will pledge me your honor?"

Though reluctantly, Henry Blythe could but give the required security, and English Tom, though still puzzled, was at last convinced that he was to have a fair field and no favor.

Word had spread rapidly among the stables that there was a fine prospect for fun on the tapis, and already a considerable number of trainers, grooms, stable-boys and ragged vagabonds who hang around every prominent racing stable for what they can pick and steal, had collected around the spot.

The moment the nature of the "fun" was fairly understood, the force of habit prevailed, and bets—or rather offers to bet—were freely bandied back and forth.

True Blue smiled slightly as he noticed the fact that not a single offer was accepted, though long odds were offered upon English Tom. For a moment he hesitated, then slipped a buck-skin purse of coin and a small roll of bills into Pharaoh's hands, saying:

"Go satisfy these gentlemen, as long as the money holds out, uncle. It's a pity they should waste their breath for nothing, and if they want to see the fun, they must expect to pay for it."

The moment these offers began to fly about, Henry Blythe began to fidget and his hands to go down into his pockets, just as the old war-horse pricks up its drooping ears at the sound of the familiar bugle. And quick following this speech of the boy jockey, came his voice in acceptance of every wager.

Old Pharaoh had little trouble in carrying out the instructions given him by the boy jockey, for English Tom, eager to make his revenge the more complete, bade the low-browed groom, who volunteered to be his second, cover the entire amount, handing him a plethoric pocket-book for that purpose.

True Blue nodded assent to the old negro's inquiring look, and the money was duly staked.

A ring was quickly formed by the spectators joining hands, and throwing off their outer garments, the antagonists confronted each other with hands up and watchful eyes, both evidently meaning business.

The contrast was more marked and the disparity between the two seemed greater than ever, as they stood foot to foot, cautiously sparring for an opening, and Henry Blythe felt angry with himself for having let the matter go so far.

Though so thick-set and burly, English Tom did not "run to fat," and despite the irregular life he had led for years, he was in very fair condition, his huge muscles being hard and firm, and his "bellows" good.

On the contrary, True Blue was as thin and bony as a greyhound in training, and the majority of those present believed that the very first blow English Tom should succeed in planting, would settle the matter.

A detailed account of what followed would hardly be suitable for these columns, and those who take pleasure in reading such descriptions must look elsewhere.

Too much, perhaps, has already been said, but the event had too important a bearing upon much that is yet to follow, for it to be passed over without mention.

Enough that the boy jockey's confidence in his powers was fully confirmed by the result of the "mill," though he did not come off scot free, for he found English Tom a much tougher and more skillful opponent than he had counted upon. Instead of ten minutes it took him nearer an hour of swift, stubborn fighting, before English Tom, a mass of bloody bruises down to his waist, failed to respond to the call of "time," and feebly signified that he could fight no more.

Though scarce a man or boy present but had lost something upon the battle, so great was the general detestation of the defeated bully, that the air was rent with cheers for the panting victor, and, had he not fought against the honor, he would have been "chained" and borne in

triumph around the grounds. Even then it required Henry Blythe's authority to disperse the excited throng.

True Blue turned to Pharaoh, who was almost weeping over the bruises that discolored the fair skin of the boy jockey, and asked him to get a bucket of cold water and sponge him down.

Right gladly the negro complied, and at the end of his vigorous bath, True Blue emerged from the stall quite refreshed and feeling "fine as a fiddle," to use his own expression. Yet it was more than one long week before he got rid of the marks left by English Tom's hard knuckles, or the soreness that followed them.

He found that Blythe and Mr. Grey had entered the large and comfortable "box" in which the gray filly Aphrodite was stabled, and followed him thither, eager to renew his acquaintance with the dainty little queen.

It was plain that she had not been tampered with, and quite as evident that her hard race of the past day had not been followed by any ill effect.

An ardent lover of a noble horse as ever drew breath, True Blue could not make enough of the handsome and intelligent creature. He petted, fondled and even kissed her velvet muzzle, greatly to the amusement and secret gratification of her owner.

"If he loves her so dearly thus soon, by the day of the race, he would rather lose a hand than to see her defeated," reasoned Blythe, and correctly.

Satisfied with their inspection, and leaving old Pharaoh on guard until they could send a trusty man to relieve him, the trio retreated to one of the deserted stables, where they believed they could converse without fear of being overheard.

Little Joe was the subject of their conversation, but before they could decide upon the best course to be pursued in regard to the matter, a truly startling occurrence took place.

With a sharp cry True Blue fell heavily to the ground, and the next instant the loud report of a pistol or gun burst upon the hearing of the two astounded men!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BULLY'S REWARD.

WHEN Lawyer Grey and Henry Blythe saw their companion fall heavily backward, with a sharp cry as of agonized pain, and heard the heavy report of the treacherous shot, their horrified surprise may possibly be imagined, but never described.

But ere they could fairly realize what had occurred, or had time to decide upon the proper course to be pursued, the dastardly attempt at assassination was avenged.

As swiftly as he had fallen, True Blue sprung to his feet, bare-headed, drawing and cocking his revolver with one and the same motion.

As already hinted, the larger portion of his young life had been spent where the law was a dead letter, where each man carried his life in his hand, not knowing at what moment he might be called upon to defend it against such odds that the slightest hesitation would be fatal to his hopes of life.

In such a school as this, one learns to think quickly, and to back up one's thoughts with deeds without any perceptible interval between the two. There is no pausing to consider whether a more feasible plan may not present itself. One acts first, and then if in a suitable condition for so doing, considers whether or no his handiwork might not have been improved, and stores away the valuable lesson thus learned, for future use.

Ten seconds before the treacherous shot was fired, True Blue had not the faintest suspicion of impending danger. But his well-trained ear caught the sharp click-click of a firearm being full cocked, and thus guided, his eye took in the full extent of the peril at a single glance.

Through a long and tolerably wide crack in the partition between the two stalls, he caught a glimpse of a battered, vengeful face staring at him over a loaded revolver.

And now the value of his wild training was evidenced.

If he sprung to either side, forward or backward, he would still be at the mercy of his bitter enemy, who could readily follow his motions through the horizontal crack with the revolver. Instead, he threw himself swiftly backward, and was almost instantaneously hidden from view of the assassin.

As he fell, he drew his revolver, and as though composed of India rubber, rebounded to his feet and sprung over the partition.

The would-be assassin, seeing and hearing his enemy fall at the instant of his firing, believed his work was done, and instinctively sought safety in flight. But the avenger was too close to his heels for that.

Even while in the air as he vaulted over the partition, True Blue caught sight of the fugitive, and scarcely waiting to steady himself after alighting, he sighted his pistol and fired.

With a hoarse, agonized bellow of pain and fury, English Tom fell all of a heap in the doorway, his right leg shattered at the knee by the skillfully planted bullet discharged by the boy jockey.

"Come forward, gentlemen!" cried True Blue aloud. "You are witnesses to the fact that I shot this fellow in self-defense, after he had fired at me. You can see he still holds the pistol in his hand—"

With a fierce, grating curse, English Tom raised the weapon and pointed it full at the breast of the boy jockey, but in his mad rage and pain, he had forgotten to raise the hammer, and once more he was baffled.

True Blue had no time to see this. He knew that a shot at such close quarters would scarcely fail of its mark, and with the natural instinct of self-preservation, he raised his pistol and fired a second shot.

Despite the imminent peril in which he believed his life to be placed, True Blue did not lose any of his natural coolness, and he felt no desire to take the life of the crippled wretch, even at this second attempt to murder him.

Guided by the swift judgment that was a strong characteristic of his nature, his hand obeyed his will and a bullet crashed its way through the bony right hand of the wounded ruffian.

The blood-covered weapon fell to the ground, and with a choking, gurgling scream, English Tom fainted.

"It's murder—bloody murder!—to shoot a man that's down and helpless!" cried a shrill, disagreeable voice from the open air.

"He who says that lies!" shouted Henry Blythe, springing to the side of the boy jockey. "I saw the whole affair, and if English Tom is dead, he has only cheated the gallows. He fired the first shot—"

"At a rat—I saw him!" interrupted the same voice. "Down with the murderer! thief that comes here to lie honest men out of their situations, and not satisfied with that, turns upon 'em and shoots them down as though they were mad-dogs!"

"That is you, Joe Cochran?" exclaimed Henry Blythe, as he stepped over the motionless, bleeding form of English Tom, and confronted the gathering crowd. "I might have known as much without asking. Just have patience for a moment, and you shall have all the attention you may care for. Is there any one among you that— Ha! Stevens," as he recognized an elderly man, a veterinary surgeon, just coming up. "See what you can do for this fellow, until we can procure the services of a regular surgeon. Saddle a good horse, some one of you—lively!"

The loud tone of authority in which the old gentleman spoke, produced its desired effect, and for a few moments it seemed as though the gathering storm was about to pass over without breaking.

The horse-doctor bent over the injured wretch. Two or three men hastened away to saddle a horse, and a dozen volunteers were eager to earn the golden eagle which Henry Blythe offered to the man who would ride to the city after the well-known surgeon, Dr. Bishop.

But the low-browed groom who had acted as English Tom's second, was not idle during these few moments.

Two of the special policemen who were detailed for duty at the Park, during the race meeting, had hastened to the spot, attracted by the unusual sounds of firing, and the groom, Joe Cochran, was eagerly denouncing to them the murderer of his friend, pointing out the boy jockey as the criminal.

Busy as he had been, Henry Blythe had not overlooked this by-play, and the moment the horseman was dispatched for surgical aid, he turned to our hero:

"Don't you be alarmed—I'll see you safely through."

True Blue smiled composedly as the excited turkite turned toward the policemen, who, followed at a little distance by Joe Cochran, were approaching.

Their faces wore a sober expression, and none who saw them could doubt that they had already formed an opinion, from the groom's report, decidedly against the boy jockey. And with the feverish interest that nearly every one has at some time felt in the misfortunes of another, the crowd pressed closer around the parties more nearly concerned.

"This is a sad affair, Johnson," said Blythe, addressing one of the policemen, whom he had long known. "But not so bad as it would have been, had not the one who deserved it worst received the worst punishment."

"But we thought it was English Tom as got hurt—an' that that young man shot him," said Johnson, scratching his head with a puzzled look.

"And that is the truth!" cried Cochran, coming closer. "If English Tom is dead or dies, I charge that man with deliberate and willful murder!"

"You see—we've got to run him in," deprecatingly.

"I see nothing of the kind," indignantly cried Blythe. "English Tom fired the first shot—he tried to murder my young friend, here, who only shot him down in self-defense. Mr. Grey, a lawyer, can tell you the same, and will join with me in being security for his appearance whenever he is required."

The gentleman appealed to give his cordial assent.

"I repeat my charge of willful murder!" cried Joe Cochran, excitedly. "You dare not refuse to arrest him. If it was one of us poor devils, without high and mighty friends, you would not need telling twice. You'd run us in so quick it'd make our heads swim!"

A sullen, almost menacing muttering from the crowd told that this speech appealed strongly to their sense of justice—or prejudice.

True Blue saw that there was trouble brewing, and drawing his pistols, held them butt first toward the policemen, saying:

"I surrender myself quietly, provided you agree to look carefully into this matter, and then act as your good judgment dictates. Now, sir," turning to the groom as the officers took his weapons, "you have charged me with willful murder, and unless you can make your charge good, in the sight of these two gentlemen, I'll see that you are put where the dogs can't bite you—mind that!"

But Cochran did not flinch. If he was lying, he had the consistency to stick closely to his text.

"I was close behind English Tom when he fired off his pistol, and I can take my oath that he shot at a rat, not at you—for he didn't even fire in your direction," he said, doggedly.

True Blue laughed shortly, and the groom began to fear that he had made a false move, but it was too late now to retract anything he had said.

The boy jockey whispered in Henry Blythe's ear for a few moments, then stood quietly by for the time being.

"Johnson," said Blythe; "ask this fellow to show you where he and English Tom were standing, when the first shot was fired; and where the rat was sitting."

With apparent readiness the groom complied. According to his story, the rat was upon a pile of loose straw and manure, into which a bullet might have passed without leaving any telltale marks behind it. But at that moment he caught sight of a something that caused his face to blanch and his knees to tremble beneath his weight.

Once more the boy jockey laughed, for he too had observed the same significant evidence.

"Now for my evidence," he cried, his voice ringing out in marked contrast to the dogged accents of his accuser. "Bring that pistol: no one has touched it since it dropped from English Tom's hand. It will show how many shots he fired.

"Now examine those fresh tracks in that soft manure. Look at the fresh powder marks upon the edge of that board, just above the track. Now go into the other stall and pick up my hat. I think you will find a hole in it, to match this track cut through my hair," and as he concluded, True Blue ran his fingers through his hair, and holding up his hand, showed that a small quantity had been severed by the bullet which had, in reality, almost grazed his skull.

Johnson cast a keen glance into the face of the groom, and there read the truth. His hand closed with a firm grasp upon the shoulder of the perjured wretch, who knew that all was lost—that instead of ruining his enemy, he had gotten into the toils himself.

"Go fetch the hat, Jones," said Johnson, to his comrade. "And while you're there, take a look for the bullet, in the boards opposite."

The second policeman obeyed, and in a few moments his voice announced a discovery. He had found the telltale bit of lead imbedded in the wood; and as he returned, he held up the hat which had dropped from the boy jockey's head when he fell to avoid the treacherous shot.

His had indeed been a narrow escape. Two inches lower, and the bullet which had merely perforated the hat, would have found its resting place in the brain of the wearer. So narrowly had English Tom failed in his desperate attempt at revenge!

CHAPTER IX.

WIT AGAINST WILE.

"You have heard his statement, and now I have presented my evidence," said the boy jockey, with an inborn dignity that strongly impressed the honest if rather slow-witted policeman whom he addressed.

"If you have any doubts remaining as to the truth of my declaration that I shot the man purely in self-defense, I am ready to satisfy them, or will go with you quietly, rather than make any more trouble."

"It's plain to be seen that there was an attempt at murder, and plainer still that this fellow lied when he tried to criminate you," promptly rejoined Johnson, his strong hand closing more firmly upon the shoulder of the pale-faced, trembling groom, but who had spirit enough left to strike one more spiteful blow.

"He shot English Tom twice—the last time as the poor fellow lay a helpless cripple upon the ground!"

At this point Henry Blythe once more interfered, and gave a brief but lucid explanation of the causes that led to the boy jockey's second shot. Fortunately both he and lawyer

Grey had witnessed the attempt of the wounded man to shoot True Blue, and their statements so plainly proved English Tom to have been the aggressor in both cases, while the boy jockey was acting simply upon the defensive, that the last, lingering doubts of the two policemen were dissipated.

Henry Blythe was thoroughly aroused by the swift-following events, and he resolved that neither of these two enemies should give his young friend any further trouble, if there was any virtue in the strong arm of the law.

Hurriedly writing a few sentences upon a page of his betting book, he tore out the leaf and handed it to Mr. Grey, bidding him take the carriage and execute his instructions without delay.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, turning to the policemen, "I'll make my charges, and I expect you to hold this fellow, and keep an eye upon English Tom, until my lawyer returns with the warrants for which I have sent him to town.

"I charge English Tom with an assault with intent to kill, and this wretch with being his aid and accomplice—an accessory before the act—and after it, too, for that matter."

The guardians of the law smiled furtively, and Henry Blythe began to doubt whether his phraseology had been quite as precise and correct as he had intended, but as his meaning was sufficiently plain, he was content to let well enough alone.

True Blue had listened to the impulsive speech of the old gentleman with rather doubtful gratitute.

For his own part he was well content to let the matter rest as it now stood, feeling satisfied that neither English Tom, nor any of that fallen worthy's friends, would ever dare to bring the matter before the keen eye of the law.

For the sake of his life-work, he did not wish to figure too prominently before the public, and if this unlucky affair was ventilated through the courts and the newspapers, he would achieve a most unwelcome notoriety, coupled as it would be, in the papers at least, with the sensational race of the past day, which he had fairly plucked from the fire.

"Don't you think we had better let the matter rest as it is, unless they or their friends first stir up the mud?" he uttered in a low tone, having drawn Mr. Blythe a little aside. "English Tom has been punished enough, surely. Even if he lives through it, he will lose a leg, if not a hand in addition. As for the other, he is only a cur that yelps as the big dog does. Let him go, too. If he tries to make any further trouble—which is doubtful, for he'll not easily forget English Tom's luck—I can easily manage him. Remember it is my quarrel."

"I know that, and if there was nothing more in the affair than shows upon the face of it, I would be well content to let them make the first move, if any must be made. But there is an undercurrent that we can't see, though I can easily guess its drift."

"Do you think that such a hang-dog looking fellow as that Joe Cochran would run the great risk he has, simply because you injured one of his friends? If so, you are a poor student of human nature. Depend upon it, he has his reasons."

True Blue looked puzzled, as though not wholly convinced.

"When I sprung through the door," resumed Blythe, in the same guarded tone, "I saw Frank Holman rapidly retreating. That first aroused my suspicions. I have known him for years. He is a stanch patron of the ring—a thorough sport, in its lowest sense. He is no coward—hardly knows the meaning of the word fear. Then why did he steal away so quickly, as though he feared detection, from the spot where the very excitement which he so dearly loves, was to be found? Simply because he was afraid we would connect his presence here with the subject of your interview with him last night."

"Then you think that Joe Cochran was acting according to orders?" inquired the boy jockey.

"He may not have been ordered to do just as he did, but I believe that my enemies, satisfied that they cannot buy you off, are plotting to put you out of the way until after the day of the race. If they succeed, of course I should be obliged to secure another rider for my filly, or scratch her—and that, as the conditions are 'play or pay,' would be the same as though she ran unplanned. If I have to put up another rider, he will almost certainly be bought by their money, and I firmly believe that this is exactly the course they have decided upon."

The boy jockey was silenced, if not convinced, and raised no further objections, while Blythe renewed his charges to the two policemen.

This point settled, they passed over to where the veterinary surgeon was still busied over English Tom, his attention directed mainly to checking the profuse hemorrhage as best he could, until the arrival of one better qualified to deal with the critical case.

"What do you think of his chances of pulling through, Stevens?" softly asked Blythe, and the old man shrugged his shoulders as he replied:

"One in a thousand—almost. The knee-joint is shattered. He will lose that leg, beyond a doubt. Nor is the other wound much better. One finger is cut clean off. The ball glanced from the pistol butt, passed through his palm, crushed the wrist, and lies, as near as I can tell, among the bones composing the elbow. If the lead can be extracted without further injury, his arm may, possibly, be saved, though he will never have much use of it; but the chances are that he will have to lose both arm and leg."

A quick shudder convulsed English Tom's mangled frame at these words, and he opened his swollen eyes which glowed with insane fury and hatred the most intense upon the two forms which stood over him.

The sight of the one whose hand had laid him low in the dust, appeared to lend him a super-human strength, for his lips parted to emit a torrent of curses and imprecations so horrible and blasphemous that, coming as they did from the lips of one who lay helpless upon the very brink of the grave, both Blythe and True Blue turned away shuddering, sick at heart.

"Come," said the former, huskily, as he wiped the cold, clammy sweat from his brow. "I must get away from this spot—I must have a long breath of fresh air—I shall have the nightmare for a month after that!"

True Blue made no reply to this, though he felt the same stifled sensation, if in a much less degree. Such scenes were by no means so new to him as to the veteran turfman, despite his youth, when estimated by years alone. And, though it was his hand that had laid English Tom low, he felt the affair much less acutely than did the old gentleman.

Henry Blythe naturally enough misinterpreted the deep and silent thought that fell upon the boy jockey, and though he said nothing at that moment, as soon as the road-wagon was ready, which he had ordered his men to hitch up, and they two were rolling smoothly around the well-kept race-course, behind a fast stepper, he sought to reassure the deeply absorbed lad with kind and consoling words.

He never forgot the expression of the boy jockey's face as he looked up: it was so full of innocent wonder, that gradually changed to comical gratitude as the kindly intentions of the old gentleman dawned upon him.

"I ask your pardon, sir," he said, apologetically; "but I had forgotten all about that affair—"

"Well I will be choked!" exclaimed Blythe. "I'd give a trifle to know the true story of your life. I'm no baby, myself, and have passed through ugly scenes, but my tough old nerves got a shock to-day that I'll not get over for a month. Yet I was only a spectator, while here you sit, as cool as a cucumber, and say you have already forgotten the whole affair! Your life must have been a queer one, indeed!"

"Strange enough, if the truth was told," soberly responded the boy jockey, a momentary shade settling over his countenance. "But one thing at a time. Do you know, a word you let drop back yonder, has given me a good idea—or what appears so to me."

"An idea about what?"

"Do you know of a good rider whom you could engage to ride the filly?" asked True Blue, ignoring the question. "One of about the right weight, and skillful enough to make your engaging him for such an important race, a perfectly natural event?"

"But I thought it was fully settled that you were to ride her!" exclaimed Blythe, wonderingly.

"It don't matter about his being one on whose honesty you would be ready to stake your life or reputation," imperturbably added the boy jockey. "Nor must his reputation be too bad; a sort of betwixt and between. Do you think you can find one of that description?"

Blythe nodded shortly. He was beginning to grow nettled under this cavalier treatment at the hands of the lad. But True Blue quietly added:

"Then engage him as soon as you like. Tell him that he shall have the mount at one hundred dollars; with one thousand extra if he wins the race. You needn't bind him to secrecy, either. And it wouldn't do any harm were you to add that you had thought of securing me to ride, but that I was too heavy."

"Will you tell me just what you mean, in as few words as possible?" exclaimed Henry Blythe, sharply, a dark frown corrugating his forehead.

"To lay a false trail for the benefit of your cousin and his friends," laughed True Blue, his eyes glowing. "You know how they tried to tempt me. Well, the moment your new rider lets out the secret of his engagement—which will not be long after you leave him—they will see their chance and jump at it, because it is far easier and much less dangerous to buy a rider than it is to 'doctor' a valuable and closely guarded racer."

"They will soon learn how much you have promised to pay the boy, and will tempt him with still higher offers, until he yields, and agrees to throw the race."

"This will satisfy them, and they will be content to wait for the golden harvest, putting all the money they can raise on what they fancy is

a sure thing. They won't try to injure the filly, because they know she cannot win against such good horses, unless she is ridden by one who knows how to and is willing to help her along."

"You will make much of your new rider, talk confidentially to him, and let him exercise the filly regularly—but under your own eye."

Henry Blythe burst into a joyous laugh, and warmly clasped the lad's hand, as the truth burst upon him.

"I understand you now, and I ask your pardon for doubting you, for the moment. I thought you were about to throw me over, for good and all. But when did you hatch this glorious plot? Why didn't you speak of it before?"

"You remember speaking about Frank Holman, and saying that you believed they were trying to put me out of the way? Well, that gave me the first hint of the plan, and I've been putting it into shape ever since."

"And that is what made you so sober—while I thought it was brooding over that nasty scrape! Well, you can take the rag off my bush for coolness!"

"I don't like to be beaten; that is all."

"See here," facing the boy jockey squarely. "I wish, as a personal favor, that you would tell me the story of your life. It must have been a remarkable one, to make such a cool hand out of a mere lad, in years."

"Will you answer me one question first?"

"If I can—certainly," was the prompt reply.

"Did you ever know a horseman named Tracy Talbot?"

CHAPTER X.

AN EVENTFUL CAREER.

HENRY BLYTHE drove on a few rods in silence, as though pondering over the question asked him by the boy jockey, whose gaze was riveted upon him with an intensity that was almost painful.

"The name sounds familiar to me," the old gentleman said at length. "But if I ever knew him, it must have been many years ago—before you were born."

"I am about twenty years of age, though I don't look it," uttered True Blue, giving no outward sign of the bitter disappointment he felt at heart. "The man I ask about was living in this city fifteen years ago. He was rich, and a passionate lover of racing, if, indeed, he did not have horses in training. He was tall, dark, good-looking, and apparently about thirty years of age."

"I know a thousand men who answer that description, but none of the name of Talbot. Still, if he was prominently connected with the turf, as recently as you say, I can find out all about him for you. But why are you so anxious to find him?—if it is not a secret," added Blythe, curiously.

"Because I have good reason to believe that Tracy Talbot is my father," returned True Blue, after a barely perceptible pause. "This, together with whatever else I may tell you of my private career, must remain a secret between us two. You agree to this?"

The old gentleman nodded rapidly. He was as curious as common report declares woman to be, and as impatient of delay in having that curiosity gratified as any spoiled child.

"I'll never open my lips until you give me free permission," he declared, fidgeting upon his seat.

Observing this, True Blue at once plunged into his subject.

"My earliest recollection of the past only goes back to the time when I was about five years old. I was then living in a great city, which I now know was New York. I was a dirty, ragged little wretch, half starved and daily beaten until I was little better than one bruise from head to foot.

"There was quite a family of us, boys and girls, and the head of this family was an old Dutch Jew. He sent us out every morning upon the streets to beg or steal, as the opportunity offered, and according to what we brought to him at night, so he treated us.

"I must have been very obstinate, or else unusually stupid, for I can remember that my allowance was more curses than caresses—and the old reprobate did kiss and fondle and reward with a good, hot supper, all those who had been more than commonly lucky in their day's work—and more kicks and cuffs than either. This was principally because I couldn't or wouldn't learn what he tried to beat into me—how to pick pockets in a workmanlike manner, and similar accomplishments.

"One evening—I believe he was half-drunk—he beat me until I was afraid he meant to kill me outright. Just who it was, I never knew, but some one thrust a heavy object into my hand, and with my strength doubled through fear and pain, I struck the old man upon the head with all my might.

"He fell to the floor like a log—only groaning once, then lying still as though already dead. And I stood over him, a blood-stained hatchet in my hand.

"To this hour I do not know whether old Simon died from that blow, or recovered from it to torture other unfortunate children; for, with a horrible fear of the hangman, I rushed

out into the dark night and never paused until, utterly worn out, I sunk down upon one of the piers, and buried my face in my hands, trying in vain to shut out that frightful sight—the old man lying there in his blood, his long white hairs stained, his face horribly distorted, his great goggle eyes staring blindly up into my face—

"The next thing I remember was crouching down in the darkest corner of a heavily rolling vessel, with the air around me close and foul smelling. I can remember screaming frantically at the top of my voice, then all at once growing too weak and ill to cry aloud, though I believed I was dying in that horrible, suffocating hold, alone and utterly friendless.

"That was my first touch of sea-sickness.

"My cries were heard, and though half-expecting to be confronted by a ghost, the sailors lifted the hatches and finally discovered me. How I came there, I could not tell them, nor do I know myself. I suppose I sought shelter there while crazed by the dead-alive stare of old Simon's eyes.

"The vessel was a coaster, plying between New York and New Orleans, stopping at the different ports between to land or take in freight.

"The captain and men, though rough, were kind-hearted fellows, and my life during that trip, when compared with what I had escaped from, was like heaven after purgatory.

"But this did not last long. The very day after we made New Orleans, the captain was stricken down by Yellow Jack, and died of the black vomit before the sun set. The sailors scattered, for fear of being placed in quarantine, and I was left to fight my way alone in the great city.

"For many weeks and months I led the life of a homeless, masterless dog, living upon the scraps I could pick up around the market, and sometimes—though this was a rare occurrence, for the yellow fever was raging not only in the city, but throughout the entire South, and there was no travel and but little business transacted, save such as was connected with the care and burial of the dead—I picked up a rare sixpence or shilling, which sufficed to keep my soul and body together.

"It was during this terrible time that I became habituated to the sight of death in its most loathsome form, and the severe training I received then, has stood me in good stead upon many a subsequent occasion.

"It was during the height of the epidemic that I made the acquaintance of the best and truest friend I ever had.

"I was wandering idly along the edge of the bay, when I came upon a man who was digging a grave beside four other mounds, just above high-water mark.

"I could see that he was just recovering from an attack of yellow fever, and he was still so weak that he was forced to rest, every few moments, though the moist sandy soil was very easy to dig into.

"Perhaps because I was tired of doing nothing, and weary of my own companionship, or it may be that I hoped to get a square meal—be that as it may, I advanced and offered to assist in digging the little grave. And that, save one, was the most important act of my life.

"I helped the man bury his dead—a fair-haired boy of about my own age—and then he told me his story. Though only an humble fisherman, with four children and a sickly wife to support out of his scanty earnings, he was as happy as the day was long until, less than one month before, the yellow fever came into his home and took away his loved ones, beginning with the wife and mother. Though ill himself, he had watched over, nursed and cared for them until, one by one, he placed them in their graves. As each one died and was laid away to rest, it seemed as though a piece of his heart was buried in the same grave, until now there was nothing for him but to die and forever end the long and weary struggle.

"Thus he spoke to me, as we filled in the last grave. No doubt he was partly crazed with grief and the trials he had undergone, and it may be that I reminded him of the little boy he had just buried. But then, as though awaking from a dream, he bade me go away—not to linger in that doomed spot—that he already felt the fever burning in his veins with redoubled force.

"I believe my good angel was directing me how to act, through all that strange, sad scene, as through the long, dreary days that followed.

"John Macrise—that was his name—lay for weeks in a state of utter exhaustion, and I watched beside him night and day, scarce lying down until the fever wore itself out, and he gradually returned to life and strength.

"This was the beginning of a friendship that even death was powerless to kill, and to the teachings and prayers of that friend, I owe what little of good there still remains in my nature.

"Though only a poor fisherman, he was a good scholar and a gentleman born. During the long evenings, and on the days when it was too stormy for us to go out after fish, he taught me patiently, and soon awakened my desire to

know more, until the pupil was quite as eager and interested as was the master.

"If those days could only have lasted, how different might have been my story!" said True Blue, with a long-drawn sigh that came from the innermost depths of his heart. "But I reckon it was written at my birth that I was to be a vagabond all my life," he added, with a hard, bitter laugh.

"I found him dead in his bed one morning—the blackest I ever expect to see dawn in this world! And in his hand, as though he had been expecting the end, was a paper willing to me all he might die possessed of.

"That was five years ago and over, yet I cannot even now talk about that day, and the few that followed after. Enough that the informal will was respected, and as I told them that I could not think of remaining where every thing would remind me of how much I had lost, the neighbors clubbed together and bought the boats, nets and other property at a fair price, paying me the money—nearly three hundred dollars.

"For some weeks I wandered about the city like the ghost of my former self, not knowing what to do. But at length I resolved to try my fortunes in California, of which, for several years past, I had heard such marvelous tales, and without much trouble I shipped on board a vessel which was bound to Frisco, as a green hand, preferring to save my little store of money to buy me an outfit and pay my way in the diggings, until I could 'strike it rich,' or at least make living wages.

"I found life on the ocean wave in this vessel vastly different from my experience upon the coaster. The captain was naturally a tartar, and his disposition was not improved by the strong liquor which he drank so freely that I honestly believe he did not draw one sober breath during the entire voyage.

"Of course the mates took their cue from him, and if ever there was one, our ship was a hell afloat. But they carried matters too far, and one dark night there was a change in the management of the vessel—the captain and his attendant bulldogs were muzzled and stowed away in the hold—where they may lie yet, for all I know to the contrary—most certainly none of our number took the trouble to release them before we went ashore.

"We landed at Frisco, safely enough and without any trouble; a simpler matter than it would be now. Then it was every man for himself, and the devil for his neighbor. We knew that no one would trouble the ship until those to whom her freight was consigned should grow impatient, but we hastened ashore and immediately scattered, each his own way.

"I sought shelter in a sailors' boarding-house, and when I wakened in the morning, I had been robbed of every cent. Of course I complained of the loss—and was beaten almost to a mummy, thrown out of the house, and then given in charge to a policeman, who promptly 'run me in,' for being drunk and disorderly. The next morning I was fined fifty dollars, and being unable to pay the amount, was set to work on the streets for twice that number of days.

"When my time was out, I was only too anxious to get out of such a hospitable city, and, after a week of starving, I managed to secure a situation—that of cook to a company of eight, who were bound for the Feather river diggings; my wages was the grub I ate—and so I spent several months.

"One day I chanced to find a small 'pocket' of gold, and buying an outfit from a lucky digger who had already made his pile, I set to work like a man.

"For nearly two years I worked away, but luck was against me, and I barely made enough to keep my head above water. Tiring of this life, I turned stage driver, then horse-trainer, breaker and dealer. This paid better, but still I was not satisfied, and drifting to Sacramento, I received a liberal offer from one of the Pony Express agents, to ride on their route.

"I accepted this offer, and for nearly a year I performed my duties to the satisfaction of all concerned. But then my old luck turned up once more. The red-skins got their backs up, and one night they went for me—and reached me, too!

"I got away from them, at last, and delivered my mail in good order—then dropped like a log from the saddle.

"My back was bristling with arrows, like the quills on a hedgehog, and for more than a week, I lay without life or motion. The odds were heavy against my ever getting up again—so much so that the boys raffled off my boots, hat and weapons; luckily my clothes were too full of holes for decent use, so they escaped the fate of the rest.

"Of course I recovered, since I am here, but I lay there for several months, and when I did get about, my occupation was gone, since I would not be fit for the saddle for a long time to come.

"Having nothing better to do, I hung around the station until a train passed by, when I was paid off and started to try my luck once more at the gold mines.

"But the wild and free life I had led as a pony

express rider, had totally unfitted me for settling down to the dull drudgery of common digging, and in hopes of striking a better lead, I wandered to and fro, until at last I found myself in the Celestial City—so named from its being the roughest, wickedest mining camp in the whole country.

"And there I made a discovery that changed the whole course of my life, and gave me a definite end to live and work for."

CHAPTER XI.

"DAN THE DIVIL."

THE boy jockey was not permitted to tell his story without many interruptions from the excitable old gentleman, who fairly lost sight of all present disagreeables in following the unassuming narrator through the lights and shadows of his truly-eventful life.

It has been thought best to omit his frequent exclamations of surprise, doubt or approval, together with the many questions which he asked and True Blue answered, lest the story told by the boy jockey should be stretched out to an uncomfortable length, while all that is strictly essential could be recorded in so much less space.

Through all that had been said, the twain had been circling round the race-course, but now those who had charge of the track, made their appearance with harrows, scrapers and sprinklers, to prepare the course for the afternoon races, and Blythe was politely requested to withdraw his rig.

True Blue began to feel the want of his dinner, but the old gentleman was resolved to hear the end of that strangely-varied story, and as the shortest way to freedom, the boy jockey picked up the thread where he had dropped it, and seated in the wagon beneath the tree, where we beheld them once before, went steadily on to the end—that is, the present hour.

"I've been in a good many rough places in my time, and seen some hard crowds, but the three or four hundred bodies—the souls among them could have been counted upon your fingers, and that without crowding—that made up the population of Celestial City at the time I first struck it, laid 'way over anything I had ever met.

"There were dead men for breakfast, dinner and supper, with an occasional free lunch when business was unusually brisk. I remember one fresh pilgrim who audibly wondered at the heavy and incessant thunder and hail-storm, while the sky was clear and the sun shone out brightly, one day as we were at dinner. When he learned the truth—that the thunder was the friendly talking of revolvers, and the hailstorm no more than the patterning of stray bullets—he lit out for a more congenial climate."

"You know that to be a fact?" hesitated the old gentleman, with a puzzled look at the sober face of his young companion. "Not that I doubt your word, but—"

"Well," laughed the boy jockey, "I may have stretched the facts a little, but the truth was bad enough. The graveyard was the most populous portion of the city, and very few persons took up their abode there who didn't die with their boots on. However, let that pass, since it does not particularly concern my story.

"Every place of this kind—every mining camp, big or little, had its bully—a sort of privileged butcher, who ran the place to suit his own ideas of what was proper, and who was wont to complain that business was dull, unless he had 'salted down' his man for that day; nor was Celestial City an exception.

"'Dan the Devil' he called himself, and seemed proud of the title. A giant in size, a professional braiser, who had made his mark in the 'squared circle' before leaving the old country, quick as a panther and strong as a bull, quarrelsome when sober, and doubly so when half-drunk, which was his usual condition, he had done more to populate the graveyard than any ten other men in the city.

"I have seen him 'run a muck' through Celestial City, yelling like an infuriated lunatic, discharging his revolvers in the air, or whatever struck his fancy would make a good mark, whether alive or inanimate. It was really amusing to see how the people strained every nerve to get out of the big fellow's way—provided you yourself were in a place of safety.

"I had Dan the Devil covered a dozen different times, ready to drop him, if I found him getting too familiar, yet I could never bring myself to shoot. He seemed so utterly unconscious of the danger he was running, and appeared to take such exquisite delight in 'playing circus,' that I couldn't bear to spoil his fun.

"You may think it strange that some one who had been injured by him, or who had lost a relative or a friend through his recklessness, did not 'lay for' and shoot him down, but a reputation like that so bloodily earned by Dan the Devil is a better safeguard than a coat of proof armor. No doubt there were many who would gladly have killed the bully, could they have been sure that their first blow—for they would never have time to deal a second—would prove instantly fatal. More than one did make the attempt, but that very doubt unsteadied their nerves, and they were added to Dan the Devil's roll-call of 'cold meat.'

"But Dan's turn was called at last, and Celestial City took a holiday. A premature blast in the mine which he and his mate were working, did the business for Dan the Devil.

"When I reached the spot, I found a crowd coolly deciding that the shortest way to wind up the job would be to fill up the shaft—not one of them all appeared to think about venturing down the shaft to see what had really happened, or if there was any trace of life remaining in the unfortunate wretches.

"Those passing by at the time had heard a wild scream of terror, cut short by a rumbling explosion, and the smoke that shot up through the narrow opening told them what had occurred. No doubt they thought it a rare chance to get rid of Dan the Devil, and so they took his death for granted.

"I had no particular cause for liking Dan Clark, but I couldn't stand that, and though some of the fellows threatened to bury me with them, I knew that there were too many white men in the crowd for that, and I brought them up, one by one.

"Dan's mate was dead—and the body was that of a woman! Never once had her secret been suspected. No one save Dan knew aught of her story, and to this day he has never mentioned her name."

"Then he was alive?" asked the old gentleman.

"Alive—but so terribly mangled and battered by the explosion, the flesh of his face, breast and arms burned almost to a crisp, that his escape was little less than a miracle. Dan the Devil though he called himself, he had thrown himself face downward upon the blast, in the vain hope of saving his mate, by confining the force of the explosion as much as possible. Yet she died, and he was saved, though blinded and a cripple for life.

"Alone I watched over him and nursed him back to life, for so great was the general hatred and fear that I could not get any one to help me, for love or money. And more than one long night have I sat beside him in the dark, a revolver in each hand, expecting with every moment the howling, drunken mob would burst down my door, to drag what remained of Dan the Devil out to a shameful death.

"Once the expected assault did come, but five minutes of hot work ended it, and the next day there were three new graves dug on the hillside, and a doctor was taking several bits of lead out of my body.

"After that I had an easier time, though I had both Dan and myself to nurse, for no one would come near us to lend a helping hand.

"Just as I was on my last ounce of dust, Dan grew sufficiently strong to understand how things were working, and one day told me where I would find his hidden store of gold, giving me an estimate of the amount, which almost bewildered me.

"I did not dare attempt to unearth it in the daytime, lest I should be followed, and I knew that there were scores of men in Celestial City who would hardly hesitate about slitting the throat of their nearest relative for a hundredth part of the sum.

"While waiting for the friendly shelter of night, Dan showed me that there had been something like method in his apparent madness. He and his mate had struck a wonderfully rich and extensive deposit of gold in sinking their shaft, and knowing what would happen if the secret was suspected, he made his name a terror to the whole camp, as the surest way of preventing any one from taking up and working a claim anywhere near him. It was a bold and hazardous plan, but its very audacity made it a complete success.

"During the eight months which had elapsed since their striking pay dirt, Dan and his mate had taken out over sixty thousand dollars' worth of gold! I know that this sounds incredible—not but that other 'finds' had proved quite as rich, but that this vast amount of gold should have been collected and stored away without any outsider suspecting the truth, yet the explanation was very simple.

"The mine was a vast 'pocket,' where the gold lay thickly upon the bed-rock, in beans and nuggets, small and large. These could be collected by hand, and were stowed away until a favorable opportunity occurred of adding them to the growing horde, unseen. Then the dirt, which had been carefully picked over, was drawn up to the surface and washed, there being enough dust in it to account for the miners sticking to the claim, yet not rich enough to induce anybody to become close neighbors to such a dangerous man as Dan the Devil.

"Dan declared that the 'pocket' was not nearly worked out, and made me a present of the claim, and I had the papers recorded in due form. If the truth had been known, of course the deserted claim would have been jumped, long before, but in everybody's opinion, it would hardly pay 'board wages,' and so I had no trouble on that score.

"I had recently formed a new acquaintance, and having tested him pretty thoroughly, I took him into partnership, and we began working the claim.

"I was still obliged to devote much of my

time to Dan, who was strangely changed since the accident. Now he was as fearful and timid as a child, and often tried my patience sorely. But he more than repaid me in the end.

"One night when he could not sleep, and I was feeling rather blue, I began to think over my past life, and something seemed urging me to tell my story to him.

"I did so, and for some time I did not notice his strange agitation, until at length he burst out sobbing like a punished child. I tried to soothe him, but he would not be comforted, and for a long time I could not understand what he was trying to say: *that my father had hired him to kill me!*"

CHAPTER XII.

WHO WAS TRACY TALBOT?

"WHEN Dan the Devil spoke those words," resumed True Blue, after a brief pause, during which a sudden hoarseness seemed to have overtaken his voice, and remained with him through this portion of his story; "I thought he had suddenly gone crazy, and freshened the light to look at him more closely. But my suspicions were wrong, and I read the truth in his scarred and powder-marked face as he repeated the strange words.

"The gray light of a new day dawned upon us before Dan Clark finished his story. There were so many questions to ask and answer, and he was never a very fluent talker.

"It was a strange, almost incredible story that he told, but I felt that it was no more than the truth, though I cross-questioned him closely upon every point, that there might be no lingering doubt in my mind.

"Dan made no secret of his reasons for leaving the old country. He was wanted by the police for a little accident which happened one night while he was inspecting the plate of an old country gentleman, but he managed to give them the slip, and came across the water for the good of his health.

"Unfortunately he chose the same line of life after landing at Castle Garden, and after a brief but very successful season, another accident happened him in the course of business, and he was obliged to change his base of operations once more—finally bringing up in this town.

"That was in the fall of the year, and as he was fond of a good horse, Dan daily attended the Fall Meeting of the Jockey Club, here. He managed to get rid of every dollar he had, by foolishly picking out the wrong horses as winners, though by so doing he became acquainted with my highly respected father, who condescended to pocket no small share of Dan's money.

"Dan concluded to get even, and he tried it on that same night. He followed his man home—to a hotel the name of which he has forgotten—and had the good fortune, as he then believed, to secure a room adjoining that in which Tracy Talbot put up.

"That was the man's name. There was a gay party of bloods in the chamber that night, and as he patiently waited with his ear against the thin partition, Dan learned the name of the man whom he intended to rob—and the peculiar circumstances which followed closely upon the heels of that night's work, fixed the name of Tracy Talbot indelibly upon his memory.

"It lacked but an hour or so of day—own when the convivial party broke up, and the light was put out and all became still in Tracy Talbot's room. But Dan the Devil was a rapid workman, and knew that he would have time enough, even though he waited until he could hear the heavy breathing of the man in the next room.

"Dan never traveled without his tools, and in half an hour from the moment of leaving his chamber, the door upon which he was at work, noiselessly yielded to his touch, and he entered the chamber.

"He moved the slide of his dark lantern, and saw a man lying upon the bed, sleeping heavily, but that one glance told him that he had made a great mistake. The man lying there had fiery red hair, while Tracy Talbot's was black as a coal.

"At that moment the gas was turned on, and the room was filled with a blaze of light. A sharp *click-click*, and Dan the Devil wheeled, to be confronted by a loaded revolver in the hand of Tracy Talbot, who stood leaning his back against the closed door.

"Dan was trapped, and he knew it. If he made a bold dash at the enemy, he would be shot down before he could reach him. Even should he succeed in this, the house would be alarmed, and his escape cut off.

"Still, he declared, he would have made the venture, but for the strange words of Tracy Talbot, who, in a low, guarded tone as though afraid of waking the red-haired sleeper, assured him that if he was sensible, he should be the gainer instead of losing anything by that night's work.

"Dan believed this, for without some such motive, without he desired to make him of use, he knew that a cool, iron-nerved man like Tracy Talbot would not have hesitated a moment before shooting him down. And believ-

ing this, he promised to do whatever his trapper bade him.

"Taking him at his word Tracy Talbot bid Dan awaken the sleeper, and Dan obeyed, for the pistol muzzle covered his every movement, and he knew that to refuse would be death.

"To make a long story short, Tracy Talbot made Dan the Devil confess that he had entered the room for the purpose of robbing the inmates; made the red-haired man write down the confession, word by word; made Dan sign his name, and the other do likewise, as witness.

"This done, he bade the red-haired man go down to the office and wait for one hour, when he was to return. If the bell belonging to that room should sound, he was to alarm the house and make all haste back to arrest the burglar. The red-haired man obeyed, like a little dog, well-trained.

"Dan the Devil was thoroughly cowed, for the first time in his life, for in Tracy Talbot he had met his master. And when he left that room, he had consented to perform the task required of him by his master: and he did so, that very day.

"It was a strange, horrible thing that Tracy Talbot hired him to do, and I found it hard to believe.

"He—Tracy Talbot—said that he was cruelly hampered by a young woman and her child. That he had deceived her by a mock-marriage, and then, when tired of her, cast her off. That was four or five years before. Now she came to him, with a child which she swore was his, as well as her own, and threatened to denounce him upon the streets, unless he acknowledged her as his lawful wife. Of course he refused, for he was then on the eve of marrying a rich heiress. He said that the woman was weak and sickly; that she was so persistent mainly because of the child, which she idolized; that if it was taken from her, she would lose all heart, and in her grief would forget to put her threats into execution, at least until it would be too late to work him harm.

"Well, Dan did the work to save himself. Tracy Talbot himself pointed out the woman—an angel of beauty, Dan said—and her child. Dan watched his chance, and stole the little boy—took the train and left the State.

"But he could not bring himself to kill the child, as Talbot had ordered—it may be that he thought it well to keep a proof of the fine gentleman's crime, believing it born in lawful wedlock. By that means he might get back the papers he had given his employer.

"He drifted to New York, and getting weary of his thankless charge, sold it to an old fence, who had bought from him the proceeds of more than one robbery. That fence was a trainer of young thieves as well. He was a Dutch Jew, named Simon Johns.

"And I was the child stolen by Dan the Devil."

"But how could he be sure, after so many years—and he blinded for life—that you were really the child?" asked Henry Blythe, with a long breath that was almost a sigh, so intensely interested had he become in this strange, wild story of the boy jockey.

"To make sure of knowing me again, if he ever had occasion to bring me forward, Dan marked the letters 'T. T.' with the date of the deed, upon my shoulder, in India ink, and it was my casual mention of this mark that led to the discovery.

"Well, there is not much more to tell. Dan returned to this place to report, and receive his pay and the confession, but he failed to find Tracy Talbot; nor did they ever meet again. Out of money, Dan tried to raise some, after the old plan, but ill-luck clung to him. He was caught, tried and sentenced to ten years at hard labor.

"He served out his time, and then drifted to California, where I met him.

"It was broad daylight when Dan the Devil finished his story, and I went to work in the mine, like one in a dream. I did not see my way clear when night came, nor for nearly a week after. Then I resolved to give my whole life, if necessary, to searching for my—for Tracy Talbot. Not for his sake—but to learn, through his lips, what had become of my mother—and to avenge her wrongs upon his head, though I died upon the gallows the next hour!

"Though with fear and trembling, Dan finally agreed to come with me, to aid in the search if he could, and bear witness to my identity in case my search was successful.

"I sold my share of the mine to my mate, and that, with my part of the gold already dug, gave me nearly like twenty thousand dollars to start on. Dan insisted on my taking charge of his money as well, and I did so, depositing seventy-five thousand dollars in the Express Company's office, and taking their receipt for it. That amount is now in the bank here, to our credit, and as much of it as you may need, Mr. Blythe, is at your service."

"Not a dollar will I touch—I will not pull you down with me, if I am to fall," and as he warmly pressed the hand of the boy jockey, there were tears in the old gentleman's eyes. But he winked them rapidly away, and added in a tone of forced jocularity: "I shall be very

proud—for I can point to my jockey who is worth seventy-five thousand dollars—"

"And who would be strongly tempted to give the whole of it for a good, square meal!" laughed True Blue, once more the careless, devil-may-care lad. "Maybe we can pick up a lunch at the stables. If so, that will be best, for we've got some work to do—the sooner we get the filly away from this place, the better."

"But I can't take her out of training—"

"You can give her all the exercise she needs on the half-mile track at your own place. There is danger of her being tampered with here, at least until you let it be generally known that I am not to ride her."

Blythe drove rapidly to the stables, where he met the surgeon, who had just finished his examination of English Tom's wounds, and who said, gravely:

"He may live, but it is very doubtful. I must take off his leg this afternoon, and his arm must follow, as soon as he can bear the operation."

CHAPTER XIII.

A MAN OF BUSINESS.

IT may be that he had been softened somewhat by the recital of his own strange story, for True Blue felt a sharp pang of regret as the surgeon pronounced his verdict—which, considering the man who gave it utterance, was almost equivalent to a sentence of death.

After all, there were worse fellows in the world than English Tom, and his punishment had been greater than his crime.

But the boy jockey saw that Henry Blythe was even more seriously troubled than himself, and choking down the regrets that were arising to his lips, he sought to turn the thoughts of the old gentleman into a more agreeable channel.

This he did by reminding his employer that time was pressing, and that there still remained business of importance to be transacted.

"We can let Little Joe and his deposition go for the present, but the sooner we get the filly away from this place, the better. There is too much at stake to run any unnecessary risk."

Henry Blythe was ready enough to admit this fact, but as important business required him to remain in town until the morrow, and as he would not trust the filly upon whom rested his honor and his life, to make the journey alone, he could only renew his orders to old Pharaoh, promising to send him a relief as soon as possible.

Lawyer Gray had already returned with the warrants for which he had been sent, and officer Jones put his bracelets upon Joe Cochran, the low-browed groom. Officer Johnson was directed to keep an eye upon English Tom until he was safely lodged in a hospital, where he was to visit him night and morning, and arrest him the moment he gained sufficient strength.

"Then you agree to put the entire management of the filly into my hands?" asked True Blue, as they rolled rapidly back to town.

Henry Blythe nodded, with a warning glance toward the driver.

"I understand; the noise of the wheels drown my words. However, it is best to run no unnecessary risk. If you will be at liberty for an hour this evening—"

"Any time after nine o'clock."

"Good! I will call, then, and let you know the course I have decided to follow. Meantime, if you could learn anything about—that man—"

"I will try. If he was at all known upon the turf, as lately as you say, I will have little trouble in finding out all about him."

Nothing more was said during the ride that concerns this story. True Blue was dropped at his hotel, and after a hasty visit to old Danny—"Dan the Devil" no longer—he lost no time in ordering his dinner.

A few moments later, a man entered the dining-room, and seating himself at the table directly opposite, also ordered dinner. But there the resemblance ceased. The boy jockey ate like one expecting to fast for a week. The stranger toyed with his food, his eyes far busier than his teeth.

By this time True Blue was becoming somewhat accustomed to being stared at, and though he had doffed his half-savage attire, he knew that his face was painted brilliantly in almost all the colors of the rainbow, thanks to the too frequent visitations of English Tom's horny knuckles. For a few moments he believed that this was the reason of the stranger's steady, thoughtful gaze, but then he began to grow irritable, and thought to stare the fellow down.

A small, but well-built man, dressed in snuff-colored clothes, even to his hat—which lay upon the floor beside his chair—and his canvas gaiters; and his linen was snuff-colored, though a shade or two lighter than his outer garments. His hair, eyes, drooping mustache and complexion were only different shades of the same color. Just to look at him made one think of sneezing.

And this was the first thought that struck the boy jockey. His angry gaze changed to a smile, then to a grin, ending in a short, explosive laugh.

The snuff-colored man arose, still staring, even as he picked up and dusted off his hat, then

nodded slowly and deliberately, as though satisfied with his inspection.

That nod appeared to be the cue for a change as complete as it was startling. With a swift motion he clapped the hat upon his head, snatched a huge pocket-book from his breast, extracted a snuff-colored card, and passing rapidly around the table, dropped the pasteboard beside True Blue's plate, uttering in a sharp, sibilant tone:

"Business—I wait for you in the office."

Only this; then he left the dining-room with such swift strides that he seemed almost to be running, and caused the ebon-hued waiter to hurriedly count the spoons and forks.

True Blue stared after him for a moment, then looked at the card. The name printed thereon was as queer as the man himself." "Lucky Coon." That and the number of a room upon the second floor of that same hotel.

Wondering what it all meant, True Blue finished his dinner, and returned to the office.

Mr. L. Coon was there awaiting him, still in his "impetuous mood." He glided swiftly to the boy jockey, and addressed him in that strange, hissing voice:

"Will you come to my room? Business—money in it—won't detain you long. Say yes."

True Blue could not entirely smother a laugh, but the little man did not appear to be easily offended.

"I know—folks do think I'm queer, at first—the fools! Don't mean you, though. Natural you should. Ask anybody—everybody—they'll tell you I'm a man of business. Ask *him!*" nodding toward the clerk, with a sudden vehemence that tilted his snuff-colored hat forward upon his nose, like some rusty extinguisher.

True Blue did not follow this advice, having but little love and less respect for the stiff-necked official who had so often attempted to snub him. Besides, his curiosity was aroused to know more of this queer, perambulating package of snuff, and without any more ado, he signified his willingness to grant Mr. Coon the interview he desired.

Almost ere the words were out of his mouth, the snuff-colored man was half-way up the long flight of stairs, and nodding sharply for the other to follow.

True Blue noticed that every person in the office was watching them closely, but the queer antics of Mr. Coon were quite enough to account for this curiosity, and he did not give the matter a second thought as he rapidly followed the little man.

"Sit down—smoke—drink—help yourself," hissed the snuff-colored man, almost before True Blue had fairly entered the chamber.

Upon the table in the center of the room, were cigars, pipes, tobacco and liquor, but nothing else that could indicate the habits, business or intentions of Mr. Lucky Coon.

He placed a chair for his visitor, almost pushed him into it, then seated himself and again nodded toward the liquor.

"Man of business—that's what I am. But talking's dry work—must oil the hinges—" which he did, most liberally. "Drink—do you good—talk better for it."

"More freely, perhaps," replied True Blue, growing a little uneasy under the fitful, yet intensely earnest gaze of those little snuff-colored eyes. "But you didn't bring me here simply to drink your liquor and smoke your cigars. You said you wished to see me on business. What business do you mean?"

Once more the little man changed his manner. He spoke as slowly now as he had rapidly before. His eyes shone as brightly, but it was with a steady glow.

"You are right, sir; I said business—business with money in it. You are a man—human; consequently you do not despise money. Am I right?"

The boy jockey nodded. This man appeared to influence him still more strongly in this mood than in the one directly opposite. He felt much as one might who was unexpectedly confronted by a venomous serpent, ready coiled for its leap. He was attracted yet repelled by the peculiar fascination of the man, and stood upon his guard, ready for whatever might come.

"Good!" said the sharp, impulsive Mr. Coon. "See here—five hundred dollars—yours if you care to take it. And double that amount when your work is done."

In an instant the boy jockey was himself again. In offering that bribe—for such it was, he could not doubt—so abruptly, Mr. Lucky Coon had cast aside the one advantage he possessed.

"Name the work, first," said True Blue, quietly.

"In a moment. I'm a gambler—made so by my name—a 'lucky coon!' Parents to blame, not me. Never mind that. I'm a gambler—make my money by betting. Until now, I've been as good as my name. But I put my money on the wrong horse—Midnight. Gray filly can beat him, all hollow. If she runs, I lose fifty thousand. *Unlucky Coon, then—eh?*"

"Better hedge your bets, then, there's time enough."

"Can't do it—lose my reputation if she wins—that's worth more'n money to me. Told the

boys gelding would win—they believe in my name—and put all their money on him."

"Well, how can I help you? What have you offered me that money for?"

"You are to ride the filly," said the deliberate Mr. Coon. "Consequently you can have access to her at all times. There is time enough for many things to happen. For instance: I will bet you five hundred dollars—and put the stakes in your own hands, as a proof of my good faith—that the filly will come to the post in the best of condition. Then I will bet you one thousand dollars—to be paid when won—that the filly Aphrodite wins the Cup race. If she goes amiss, or breaks down, or falls sick and dies before the day of the race, of course you win both wagers. You understand?"

The boy jockey did understand, and his first impulse was to seize the decanter which stood at his elbow, and hurl it into the face of his tempter; but with a violent effort he controlled his anger. It should be diamond cut diamond.

"I understand this much; that an honest lad too often has to whistle for his pay, after faithfully doing his work. The five hundred would be all right, since that would be in my hands; but when I asked Mr. Lucky Coon for one thousand dollars more, what security have I that he would remember it?"

"My word—" began impulsive Mr. Coon.

"I'd rather have it in black and white. Give me a written promise to pay, stating what for, and I'll talk business—not before."

The little man eyed True Blue keenly; then, as if satisfied, he wrote the required pledge upon a leaf of his note-book, signed and passed it across the table.

The boy jockey read it carefully, then folded and put it into his pocket with a mocking laugh.

"I told you I would talk business, as soon as I got your written promise, and here it is. Unless you wish to lose your money, *hedge your bets!* for as I stand here, I swear the filly shall win that race, if man and horse can do it!"

"As for this note, you will have the pleasure of reading a copy of it in all of the morning papers, if money can insure its insertion. So, Mr. Lucky Coon, good-day to you—and pleasant dreams this night!"

With a taunting laugh, the boy jockey left the room.

Was it only the echo of his laugh that sounded from the inside? Or did it come from the lips of the outwitted gambler?

CHAPTER XIV.

TRACY TALBOT MAKES AN APPOINTMENT.

TRUE BLUE paused and listened intently, a puzzled look upon his face. He could scarcely believe his ears, yet he knew that they had not deceived him. Mr. Lucky Coon was laughing, not with the hollow, forced merriment that is sometimes assumed to cover defeat, but with a hearty, ringing peal, that could only proceed from the lungs of one who was perfectly satisfied with himself and the world—a victor, rather than vanquished.

This—under the circumstances—extraordinary sound was a most effectual damper to the high spirits of the boy jockey, and his was a very sober, perplexed countenance when he reached his own room.

He sat down and went over the entire interview, from first to last, with the written pledge of Lucky Coon lying unfolded before him. But try as he might, he could not see where he had made a single false step. He had won every point; he held the written evidence that would cover the gambler with shame and confusion, were its contents made known. And yet—that laugh had been one of unalloyed satisfaction—of pure triumph.

"I cain't see through the p'izen tangle," he muttered, relapsing into the free and easy dialect of the plains and mountains. "The 'tarnal critter is too hefty fer me. But we'll see which side o' his meat-trap he'll laugh out of when he sees this dockymint in black an' white prent. Durn the varmint! I wish I'd never set my two eyes on him!"

Try as he might, True Blue could not shake off the growing suspicion that Mr. Lucky Coon had, in some shape, gotten the better of him during that brief encounter; yet how? There was the rub! Could he have given even a guess at the truth, the boy jockey would have snapped his fingers, carelessly. It was the unseen, unknown, that troubled him. And troubled him so greatly that he seemed stifling in that small, ill-ventilated room, until, without any definite end in view, he caught up his hat and left the hotel, walking straight on, through the crowded streets, until the open fields lay before him.

Still thinking, he paused beneath a shady tree, and lay there upon the green turf until the sun set and the shades of night began to gather around him.

Then he arose, and stretched his limbs, with a yawn of relief. The enigma was still unsolved, but he had decided upon his first move, and that was something.

"I'll show the paper to the old gentleman, an' tell him the hull story, then ax him what

will I do about it. Mebbe he kin tell me whar the laugh comes in."

Though he had a goodly distance to travel before reaching the hotel of his employer, True Blue was in no hurry, for he knew that there was time enough and to spare for the few words he had to speak.

He had not yet reached the business portion of the city, when all his senses were suddenly aroused.

For some time past he had heard the echoes of a heavy foot behind him, though paying but little attention to the fact. All at once, and without any particular reason therefor, the thought struck him that the owner of those feet was dogging him, for no good purpose. He could not have explained why he believed this, but it was a fact; instinct rather than reason warned him to be upon his guard.

He pressed rapidly on for a few moments, then paused beneath the glare of a street-lamp, and faced around, one hand in his breast, firmly grasping the butt of a revolver.

Contrary to his expectations the footsteps did not falter, but steadily advanced, and as the man passed inside the circle of light, a voice from the darkness beyond him called out sharply:

"Tim Dorgan—to the devil wid yer long legs! It's out av breath I am, thryin' to catch ye up! I've a wurrud to ye from the ould man—Tracy Talbot."

At this name, coming so unexpectedly, a sharp exclamation broke from the lips of the boy jockey. He could have bitten off his tongue as he saw the man addressed as Tim Dorgan turn quickly toward him, but his wit was equal to the emergency.

Slipping a cigar from his vest pocket, he advanced.

"Excuse me, gentlemen, but I'm out of matches, and am not tall enough to reach the lamp, yonder. Can either of you favor me with a light?"

"Did ye iver see a Pat-lander as c'u'den't do that same, yer hanner? Devil a man o' us but c'u'd make a fire by scratchin' a eye-sickle on the hind leg av us, av no betther manes offered. Here's a match, yer hanner, an' may the smoke av yer see-gar smell in yer nasthrils like the Garden of Aden in full bloom!"

"Bite it off, and keep the rest for another time, Mike; you're bothering the gentleman with your blarney. Come—I'm in a hurry. What is it old Tracy Talbot wants of me?" impatiently interrupted Dorgan, grasping the arm of his comrade, who had apparently a full cargo of the "crarythur" aboard, and forcing him up the street.

True Blue did not stop to light his cigar, but immediately followed the men with the stealthy tread of an Indian upon the war-trail, listening with painful eagerness to the words that followed.

"Devil a wan o' me knows what he wants," Mike replied. "He kem to me an' towld me to hunt ye up—to tell ye that he had wurruk for ye, an' fer ye to mate him this night at the owld place, whin the clock struek tin. Now ye've got it, honey!"

"I won't keep him waiting," said Dorgan, with a short, disagreeable laugh. "The old man is too good pay for that. Are you in the job, too?"

"No—worse luck! whisky, ye're the devil! Ay I'd only bin sober, I w'u'dn't be huntin' ye up."

True Blue felt just then that whisky was a blessing, since it had been the means of putting him upon the track of the man he had vowed to hunt down.

The boy jockey found it an easy task to trail his game, for, though little more was said about Tracy Talbot, their tongues ran freely and loudly. This was fortunate, since the streets just there were but poorly lighted, and only for their voices, he must have run one of two risks: arousing Dorgan's suspicions by dogging him too closely, or else risk losing him in the gloom.

But ere long they turned into better lighted, more frequented streets, and though Dorgan cast more than one glance over his shoulder, it was the instinctive caution of one who was habitually at odds with the law, rather than an act of present suspicion.

Presently Mike stopped his comrade before a saloon.

"It's too airly yet for the owld man, Tim, an' me throat's as drhy as a praste afther saying mass. Be a man fer wance, an' wet the grand job that's ahead av ye. Sure, didn't I speake the good wurrud fer ye?"

Dorgan hesitated, with a quick glance around him, then yielded and the two men entered the saloon.

True Blue took up a position where he could watch the door, without betraying his purpose, but as the minutes dragged slowly by, without the reappearance of his game, he began to fear that they had unconsciously given him the slip, through some other mode of exit.

No sooner did this thought strike him, than he crossed over and entered the saloon, drawing his hat well down over his eyes.

His heart leaped gladly as he recognized his game, sitting at one of the round tables, earnestly conversing, and resolving to run no further

isks of losing them, he ordered some drink, and seated himself at one of the tables furthest from the door. From this position he could see everything that transpired within the room, over the paper which he appeared to be reading with the closest interest.

Scarcely had he fairly settled down, when the swinging doors opened, and a flashily dressed man entered. And once more the boy jockey's heart thumped loudly at his ribs, and he held his paper higher as the new-comer, giving an order for a cocktail, leaned carelessly against the bar and leisurely surveyed the occupants of the room. For that man was Frank Holman.

For the first time True Blue began to suspect that another trap was being laid for him, and to realize how strange it was that those men should have uttered the name of Tracy Talbot just at that precise moment. And yet, it might have been only a coincidence, and had not Holman appeared upon the scene, not the faintest doubt would have troubled the boy jockey.

But he was not given much time to reflect upon the matter, for Holman turned and left the room, and a few moments later Dorgan and his mate did the same.

True Blue hastily paid for the liquor he had scarcely touched, and receiving his change, passed through the door, almost running against Dorgan.

The surly fellow turned upon him with a fierce curse at his awkwardness, and more welcome sound never met True Blue's ears as he shuffled away, for it told him that he was not suspected.

He did not go far before crossing the street, where the shade was deeper, and there he paused to await the further movements of his game.

His patience was not sorely tried. In a few moments Dorgan parted from Mike, who called after him to put in a good word for him with the old man.

Dorgan vouchsafed no reply, but passed rapidly up the street, followed, though upon the opposite side of the way, by the boy jockey.

The latter had made no attempt to shape any plan of action, for he knew that all must depend upon the circumstances under which Talbot was met, and when Dorgan entered a door over which hung a red lamp, True Blue crossed the street and followed him, without a moment's hesitation, up a long and narrow flight of stairs.

The boy jockey was not wholly unsophisticated, and he felt sure that those steps led into a gambling hall; nor was he mistaken.

At that time and place, the doors of such resorts were not jealously guarded. Every one was free to enter, day or night—the more the merrier.

Though early, the room was pretty well filled, and for a short space True Blue could not make out his man. But then he saw him—facing the door, and talking earnestly to a tall, well-clad gentleman, whose back was turned toward the boy jockey.

Was that—could that be Tracy Talbot?

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE DEN OF THE TIGER.

THAT Tim Dorgan was talking with Tracy Talbot was the first thought of the boy jockey, and his heart almost ceased its pulsations as he stared fixedly at the broad shoulders of the man, longing, yet fearing, to see his face.

He was not kept long in suspense. He saw—or fancied he saw—a gleam of recognition in the black eyes of Tim Dorgan as they dwelt for an instant upon his face. And this fancy was strengthened, as the other man turned abruptly around, facing the entrance, and revealing the darkly-handsome features of Frank Holman, the gambler.

A passing glance was all, and not the faintest trace of recognition appeared upon his countenance as the gambler turned away from Dorgan toward the tables, where faro and roulette was being played.

If indeed he was playing secretly against the boy jockey, it would have been better for Holman's little game if he had held his features a trifle less under control. Cool hand though he undoubtedly was, he could not have forgotten his double defeat so easily, and had True Blue's appearance been wholly unexpected, he would have shown some emotion, of either chagrin or anger. So at least the boy jockey reasoned, and from that time he was upon his guard, ready for whatever might turn up.

Had he been absolutely sure that there was an understanding between Tim Dorgan and Holman, he would probably have beaten a retreat at once, satisfied that the allusion to Tracy Talbot had been but a lure to the more surely lead him into the toils; but a doubt remained in his mind, and he felt that there was too much at stake for him to throw away even the slightest chance of running his game to earth. He might never again have an opportunity of meeting Tracy Talbot, and he resolved to wait and watch, letting time settle all doubts.

This was by no means the first time True Blue had found himself in a "gambling hell," and though he had no particular liking for play, there were few games of chance with which he was not tolerably familiar. Such an education

is part and parcel of the wild life he had led since early childhood, and, though I do not pretend to hold the lad up as a model for my younger readers to pattern after, I do claim that True Blue is a fair specimen of a Western boy who "grewed up," rather than was "raised," and think him entitled to no little credit for having passed through so many trials and temptations, without being utterly ruined.

As generally is the case, there were a number of habitual loafers and broken-down gamblers in the room who had neither the means nor credit to join in the game, but who, unable to resist the terrible fascination with which the "tiger" enchains its victims as well as favorites, were hanging around the tables in hopes of being "staked" by a more fortunate fellow. In outward appearance, thanks to the knuckles of English Tom, True Blue would have matched well with the most dilapidated of these unlucky "sports," and might have passed the entire evening among them in idleness, without exciting comment, but instead, he pressed up to the faro-table and began to play.

His object in so acting was twofold. Supposing that Tim Dorgan was there to keep a genuine appointment with Tracy Talbot, that worthy would be less likely to suspect there was anything more than pure chance in this third meeting since the sun went down, if he saw the other busied in play. Then, too, it would help pass away the time, while he could keep an eye upon his man, all the same.

Having a fair knowledge of the game, and betting moderately, True Blue kept about even for the first half-hour and his spirits rose as he saw that Tim Dorgan appeared to be growing impatient. If the appointment was not genuine, why did the fellow fidget around so, and keep watching the door so keenly? Surely he was expecting somebody. What more likely than that that somebody was Tracy Talbot?

While placing a small stake upon the last turn, True Blue felt a new-comer press in beside him, and with a strong scent of musk in his nostrils, he looked up and saw Frank Holman standing at his right hand, extracting a bank-bill from a large and well-filled pocketbook.

"A stack of red checks, if you please," he said, tossing the money across the table to the dealer. "I'm on it to-night, Johnny! It's your bank or my pocket—one of the two has got to go broke, sure!"

True Blue's first impulse was to draw out, but as Holman was apparently unconscious of his proximity, and as the crowd of non-players drew more closely around the table at Holman's bold challenge, he concluded to wait a while longer until he could retreat more readily than at present.

Frank Holman appeared resolved to make his words good, for he doubled each bet as he won, until he had nearly a thousand dollars depending upon a single turn of the cards.

The cards were drawn slowly from the silver box, and a buzz of admiring envy went up from the broken-down sports, as the wager was decided against the bank.

Without the alteration of a muscle, the dealer paid the stake, then swiftly shuffled the cards for a fresh deal, slipping them into the box, and pausing for a moment to allow those who chose, to make their bets.

At this instant True Blue felt—or fancied he felt—a hand touch him upon the hip, and turned his head quickly; but the angry exclamation died away upon his lips as he saw the face of Tim Dorgan close to his own, and heard the latter say:

"Make a little room, please. I want a finger in this pie."

Not caring to attract the fellow's attention any more than he could help, True Blue moved a trifle closer to Frank Holman, watching for an opportunity to withdraw quietly. That would not come before a fresh deal, for he knew how sensitive confirmed gamblers are.

Besides, despite his anxiety and suspense, he was growing interested in the bold, dashing play of the gambler upon his right. He was betting heavily upon every turn of the cards, but with singular ill-luck. Stake after stake he lost in rapid succession, until, before the deal was half out, his winnings of the previous deal were all gone.

Had not the boy jockey been wholly absorbed in watching the play of Holman, he might have noticed another curious fact.

Though betting far more modestly, Tim Dorgan was winning as often as Holman lost. If the latter played one card to win, Dorgan promptly backed it to lose.

Others noticed this point, if the boy jockey did not, and their interest in the game increased with each bet.

With a short, defiant laugh, Holman placed his last stack of chips upon the queen; only to see them drawn in by the imperturbable dealer, a few turns later.

"Stop the deal, Johnny, and give me a stack of 'blues.' No more baby play, now I've got my hand in. It's make or break, I tell you—H—l and furies!"

While speaking, Holman thrust his hand first into one pocket, then into another, finally interrupting himself with the furious curse recorded

above, at the same time springing back and breaking forcibly through the closely packed crowd of spectators.

"There's a thief in the room! my pocket has been picked! Stop! the first man that attempts to leave this room before the thief is discovered, will get a bullet through his head!" and the gambler emphasized the threat with a fierce oath, as he drew a short, heavy derringer from his bosom.

At the first words, several of those present had made an instinctive move toward the door, but one and all paused as the gambler barred the way, for his white, set face and blazing eyes plainly told that his was no empty threat.

Closely following his words, came a curious voice, which True Blue, if no other, instantly recognized with a peculiar thrill, though not exactly of fear.

"That's fair—no honest man will object—and the thief daren't. Each one of you watch the rest, to see that the thief don't drop the money!"

The voice was that of the little snuff-colored man, Mr. Lucky Coon, who must have entered the room after True Blue became absorbed in the bold play of the man who now claimed to have been robbed.

For a moment Holman appeared to be startled—probably astonished that another should so promptly take up his cause, unmasked—but then cried, with unfeigned pleasure:

"Good! you're just the man to settle this little affair, and I gladly place it in your hands. Act as you think best. The thief must still be in the room, for I felt my pocket-book, safe enough, not five minutes ago. I'll keep guard over the door."

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Lucky Coon, suddenly falling into his slow, methodical manner, as he surveyed the motley group before him, "Gentlemen, a grave charge has been made against some one of our number, as yet unknown to any save himself. A crime has been committed—a pocket has been picked—and until the actual criminal is discovered, we one and all stand under suspicion—I as well as you."

"None, save the one dishonest person, can afford to rest under this suspicion one instant longer than is absolutely necessary to make the truth known. In this case the majority rules, and the guilty must suffer, to save the innocent."

"You all heard Mr. Holman place this affair in my hands for investigation, and by that authority I call upon the guilty party to step forward, and thus spare us any further trouble or annoyance."

"I didn't expect he would," he added, after a brief pause. "Few men care about fitting the rope around their own necks, even though they know it must be done by some one. That failure to confess, leaves only one course open."

"All honest men will form in line before me. No crowding, gentlemen; there's time enough."

True Blue's brain had been in a whirl from the first words of Frank Holman, but he did not fully realize the situation until the order was given to fall into line. Then, by pure accident, his hand struck against something hard in his tail pocket—and he remembered the touch he had felt upon his hip, a few minutes before.

He knew then that the stolen pocket-book was upon his person!

CHAPTER XVI.

A FLASH IN THE PAN.

SWIFTER than thought itself, the truth flashed upon the mind of the boy jockey.

Tim Dorgan had been following him, watching a favorable opportunity for speaking the words which were to lure the boy jockey to his fate. The words were uttered, and the bait greedily swallowed.

Holman was probably the author of the plot, Dorgan only his instrument for carrying it out. The reason for his playing so recklessly was a secret no longer. He wished to show his pocket-book, and then, by losing, make the discovery of the theft, real or pretended, in a perfectly natural manner.

True Blue was almost certain that the pocket-book was now in the tail pocket of his coat; that it had been deposited there when he felt those fingers touch his hip; that those fingers belonged to Tim Dorgan, who was acting under instructions from Frank Holman—and that in a few moments more he would be branded as a thief.

For one instant he glanced around him with a mad impulse urging him to make a desperate effort to burst through the toils in which he had been so cunningly entangled. But there was only one place of exit, and Holman, with ready pistol, held possession of that. Something in the gambler's keen black eyes told him that he would not hesitate to keep his threat of checking any attempt at flight with a bullet. And the same sweeping glance revealed the stout form of Tim Dorgan close beside him, apparently in readiness to grapple with his victim, in case he gave the faintest excuse for such treatment.

Thus True Blue interpreted the sidelong glance with which the burly rascal was regarding him, and knowing that escape by flight was an impossibility, he resolved to make the best of a bad predicament.

He believed that this was a cunning trick to prevent him from riding the filly in the forthcoming race; for when it became generally known that he had been caught picking a pocket in a gambling hell, was it likely that Henry Blythe would dare trust him to ride a race upon which his all depended?

Let them find the pocket-book. Unless he offered resistance, they would have no excuse for maltreating him very seriously. He would be arrested and charged with theft; but he believed that he could convince Mr. Blythe of his innocence, and induce him to secure his release upon bail.

So far the boy jockey had reasoned, during the rather pompous speech of the little snuff-colored man, and when the order came for them all to fall into line, he obeyed with the rest, without any perceptible hesitation. He found himself near the center of the party, while Tim Dorgan stood next but one on his right hand.

"Many thanks for your prompt obedience, gentlemen," resumed Mr. Lucky Coon, still in his moderate mood. "When a disagreeable piece of business must be performed, 'twere well 'twere done quickly—ahem!"

"Now, Mr. Holman," and as he wheeled swiftly and faced the gambler, he was the brisk, nervous, fidgety speaker once more. "Describe the missing property—what it looked like—what was in it—and so on."

"A large sized bill-book of purple morocco leather, containing two letters addressed to me, five bank notes of one hundred dollars each, together with some few smaller bills—in all about six hundred dollars."

"Any particular marks—name, eh?"

"Yes. My name and address is written inside of the pocket which contains—or contained—the larger bills," was the prompt reply.

"Very good. That fact will enable us to identify the stolen property—as soon as we get hold of it. Now, sir, be so kind as to go through me."

Holman stared, but Mr. Lucky Coon nodded sharply:

"Of course I mean it—why not? I'm as open to suspicion as any one of these gentlemen. I'm going to search them, but first you must search me. If not, the criminal might swear that I slipped the pocket-book from my person to his, only pretending to find it."

This speech was well received by the men drawn up in line, as a general sound of approval evidenced, and Frank Holman hesitated no longer, but "went through" the pockets of the little snuff-colored man in a truly professional style—as one facetious individual hinted, in a stage whisper.

Holman joined in the general laugh which followed this criticism, nor was his good humor in the least degree feigned. He was playing a risky game, for high stakes, and all had thus far succeeded beyond his most sanguine hopes. He could afford to bear with a little good-natured railery.

"You understand, gentlemen?" and Mr. Coon once more faced the ranks. "The missing property has not been found upon my person, consequently I am not the criminal, but am duly qualified to act as searcher-in-chief of the other occupants of this room. Still, I would rather be spared the task, and if the guilty one will step forward and acknowledge his crime, I will esteem it as an especial favor."

Mr. Lucky Coon paused, and True Blue fancied that the little snuff-colored eyes rested longer upon his face than any other, as they deliberately ran along the line. But not a muscle of his countenance altered. He knew that he was snared, but he would do nothing to hasten the catastrophe. Let them spring the trap after their own fashion. And then—his teeth closed firmly, and a dangerous light filled his eyes as he gazed at Frank Holman.

"Very good," snapped the little brown man, in a petulant tone. "If the thief has no consideration for our feelings, neither will we have for his."

"Now to work. You will all please hold both hands above your heads, and keep them there until you have been searched. Then there will be no chance for the thief to pass the pocket-book along to a pal who has been searched. Up hands, gentlemen!"

The majority of those present began to rather enjoy the peculiar scene than not, and two score hands went up into the air, amid loud laughter and many quips and jokes. Even Holman, with so much at stake, could not suppress a smile at the queer scene.

Not so with the little brown man, who had fairly begun his task of searching the twenty and odd men. The fate of a nation might have rested upon his shoulders, judging from the awful gravity and sense of responsibility written upon his countenance. In vain those whom he was searching jokingly begged him to spare them, and they would divide the plunder—it was all serious business to him.

One by one he searched and pronounced the men innocent, giving them leave to stand aside and lower their hands, until, at length, he reached the boy jockey.

Holman drew nearer, a devilish triumph

gleaming in his black eyes and showing forth from his every feature, while Tim Dorgan eagerly peered behind the back of the one man who stood between him and True Blue.

Mr. Lucky Coon paused to wipe the perspiration from his brow with a dingy brown bandanna, and his eyes met those of the exultant gambler. A quick flush passed over Holman's face, and he fell back to his original position.

Mr. Coon turned sharply around to resume his task, when the unusual interest displayed by Tim Dorgan attracted his attention.

"Don't you be in a hurry, my man. Your turn will come in good time. Keep your hands up! Unless you want us to suspect that the stolen money is beginning to burn a hole in your pocket!"

Dorgan's lips parted for an angry retort, but Holman managed to catch his eye, and gave him a warning look. Though sullenly, the fellow faced about and straightened up his hands.

Mr. Lucky Coon began with searching the breast and vest pockets of the boy jockey, and as he did so, his snuffy face wore a provoking leer of recognition that caused the hot blood to leap swiftly through the lad's veins, and made him long to dash his clenched fist into the fellow's mocking eyes.

It may be that the little brown man read something of this temptation in True Blue's eyes, for he hurriedly finished his examination in front, and passed around behind the boy jockey.

At least three hearts in that room beat fast and furiously as Mr. Coon knelt down upon the floor for the purpose of more conveniently examining the lad's tail-pockets. Beat furiously—then almost stopped, as the searcher uttered a short exclamation and arose, a large pocket-book in his hand.

"Stop!" he cried, in a sharp voice of command as Tim Dorgan made a movement as though about to spring upon the boy jockey. "Keep your place, sir, or I'll arrest you on suspicion of being the thief, without searching further. Here, sir," addressing True Blue, and holding out the pocket-book, which all could see was one of unstained leather. "Take your property, and join the others who have been searched and found innocent."

True Blue mechanically obeyed, scarcely able to realize that he had been pronounced innocent.

Holman stared in open-mouthed astonishment, then uttered a curse, so furious that those nearest him involuntarily shrunk away from him as they might from a madman.

Dorgan stared at the pocket-book which True Blue still held in his hand, as though unable to believe his eyesight. Could he have made a mistake, after all?

With a sharp, cracked laugh, Mr. Lucky Coon placed one hand upon the bewildered fellow's shoulder. Dorgan flung it rudely off, with a fierce oath, then—just how it happened, he could never tell—found himself lying half-stunned upon the floor, with the little snuff-colored man kneeling upon his chest, one hand upon his windpipe, the other holding the purple morocco pocket-book which Frank Holman had so carefully described!

"There is some mistake—" faltered Holman.

"A mistake that will end in State's prison," sharply interrupted Mr. Lucky Coon. "Gentlemen, you heard the charge of theft—you saw me find the stolen property—and you are witnesses for the prosecution in this case. I know your names, and where to find you when needed."

A swift motion, and Tim Dorgan was handcuffed. A sharp whistle, and two policemen entered the room, with clubs drawn. Tim Dorgan was jerked upon his feet and thrust through the doorway, caught in his own spring!

CHAPTER XVII.

TRUE BLUE MEETS WITH ANOTHER SURPRISE.

ALL this—the overthrow of the burly ruffian, the producing of the purple morocco pocket-book, the handcuffing, the promptly obeyed whistle, plainly proving that the two policemen had been lying in wait for some such signal, and the rapid, masterly retreat to the outer air with their half-stupefied prisoner; all this transpired so rapidly that not a hand could be lifted to effect Tim Dorgan's rescue, even had his friends present cared to run the necessary risk.

Probably no other persons present were surprised at the result of the search, but True Blue and Frank Holman assuredly were. The former had so surely felt that he was entrapped, without a hope of escape, that this unexpected dénouement left him almost as thoroughly demoralized as could have been the case had the handcuffs been applied to his wrists, instead of manacling those of Tim Dorgan.

Frank Holman was no less astonished, and far less agreeably. He could only account for it in one way: Dorgan had stupidly "planted" the wrong pocket-book, thus spoiling a cunningly contrived and—with that one exception—admirably executed plan.

His first impulse, as we have seen, was to interfere in favor of his luckless tool, but the keen, searching glance which Mr. Lucky Coon turned upon him, gave timely warning of the danger

such a proceeding would entail upon himself, and biting his lip fiercely, he stopped short in his hasty speech.

"Remember, gentlemen," the little snuff-colored man paused upon the threshold to utter; "you will hold yourselves in readiness to testify in this case, if called upon. And you, Mr. Holman, will be obliged to appear, if only to identify and reclaim your property. Until you do so, I hold myself responsible for its safety."

The gambler made no reply. His black eyes were fixed upon the face of the boy jockey, with an evil light in their depths. The pistol was still in his hand. There was murder in his heart. Three times had he been defeated by that insignificant boy.

True Blue saw that evil stare, and read what was going on in the busy brain behind those glittering eyes.

The sense of danger instantly restored his usual coolness, and keeping his eyes fixed upon those of the gambler, his fingers closed upon the butt of his revolver, his thumb upon the hammer.

Frank Holman trembled upon the verge of his own grave at that moment. Had he yielded to the mad impulse that urged him to avenge his triple defeat by means of a swift bullet, he would never have left that room alive.

But the threatening tragedy did not take place. One of the gambler's friends, little suspecting how important his careless action was, stepped between the two and began bantering Holman upon what had occurred. Others crowded around, laughing and joking, and when the gambler impatiently freed himself, he saw that the boy jockey had vanished.

With a prudence that he rarely exhibited, True Blue had improved his opportunity, and hastily left the hall, almost tumbling headlong down the stairs in his haste—not to escape from the anger of Frank Holman, but to overtake the little brown man.

In this, however, he was disappointed. The policemen and their captive had disappeared, and Mr. Lucky Coon had vanished as suddenly as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up.

The boy jockey stood for a few moments, irresolutely looking first up, then down the street, unable to decide which course he had best follow in hopes of overtaking the little snuff-colored man.

Just why he was so anxious to find the man, True Blue could not have told, had the question been asked. That he had little scruple—was, in fact, but little better than Frank Holman or James Hudson—his conduct at the hotel that day, plainly evidenced. And yet, the somewhat superstitious lad felt as though he must find him, or—

He heard the door open, and distinguished the voice of Frank Holman, who, in company with several others, was leaving the hall.

A few days before, he would have laughed at the idea of his avoiding any such encounter, but now he turned and passed swiftly down the street.

These repeated efforts to bribe or entrap him, had given the boy jockey a somewhat exaggerated sense of his importance, and of the responsibility which rested upon his shoulders. He began to think that upon his safety depended the welfare of Henry Blythe—that he alone could defeat the plotters by piloting the gray filly to victory—that if he was put out of the way, the ruin of his employer would be assured.

This exaggerated idea of his own importance, however, was productive of more good than evil, since it taught True Blue that prudence which he had hitherto utterly ignored. While so much was at stake, he felt that he had no right to run any unnecessary risks, and hence abandoned his idea of searching after Mr. Lucky Coon, rather than chance coming in contact with Frank Holman, just then.

Knowing that Henry Blythe must be at liberty and awaiting his coming, by this time, True Blue turned his steps toward the hotel, which he soon reached.

With a blissful ignorance of polite usages, the boy jockey hastened at once up the steps and along to the room where he had met Mr. Blythe previously, and rapping sharply at the door, opened it and entered without awaiting an invitation.

Fortunately Henry Blythe was little given to ceremony and rather liked the blunt, off-hand manner of his employee.

He was alone, and waiting the promised call. Upon the table were wine, cigars and a substantial lunch.

"Sit down and help yourself," he said, heartily; but though the boy jockey drew his chair close to the table, he did not avail himself of the invitation.

"Time enough for that after we're through with business," he said, casting a swift yet comprehensive glance around the handsome apartment. "You are sure we are alone? that there's no danger of anybody's overhearing us?"

"Perfectly sure; but we're not going to plan a murder, nor even a burglary," laughed the old gentleman.

"No; but there's more than one man who would give a snug little sum to hear, even at

second hand, what I am about to say. There's more than money at stake, Mr. Blythe, though what it is, I can't even guess. I only wish I could!"

There was a seriousness in the manner of the boy jockey that strongly impressed the excitable old gentleman. His jesting mood instantly vanished.

"Have you learned anything more since you left me? Has anything happened—but I see there has!"

"Let me tell you first what I have determined upon doing; then we'll talk about a little adventure I had this evening," quietly said the boy jockey.

"You will be put to a little more expense and trouble, by following the plan I have formed, but I honestly believe that it is the only chance for either the filly or yourself. If you leave her where she is, to take her exercise at the Park, where any and everybody can come and go as they please, she will never come to the post when the bell is rung for the Cup race. She will either be dead, or so 'doctored' as to effectually spoil her chances of winning, watch her as closely as we may."

"I intend to take her to my own place, to-morrow."

"Good enough, so far as it goes. Now listen. I mean to ride her in that race, if she and I are both alive. I can, by hard work, train myself down to the weight—one-fifteen. If nothing serious happens to either of us, we will win that race. But nobody—not even your daughter—must know this. By to-morrow night you must have secured another jockey, and you must manage to let that knowledge leak out, as though against your will. You can easily manage it.

"You must act toward the boy you hire just as though he was actually to ride the filly, up to the very moment of weighing. Instruct him as carefully, treat him as generously—but you understand."

"But what reason can I give for a change, at the last moment? It will cast suspicion on the boy—"

"If he don't deserve it, you can easily make amends. But if you choose the right sort, he will deserve all the suspicion he receives. It must be done, for if your rider can't be bribed, the filly will suffer, as sure as there is a heaven above us!"

"Look at what has already happened. Failing to bribe me, English Tom was set to knock me out of time. *That* failed, and you know what followed. I pulled through that, and scarcely had I got my breath again, when another party offered me a large sum to cripple the filly; I will show you written proof, presently."

"This evening another and still more cunning trap was set for me, baited with the name of the man I have sworn to hunt down—Tracy Talbot. Two strangers to me passed me in the street, and one told the other that Tracy Talbot wished to see him on important business, at the old place. Of course I followed them, for they gave me no cause to suspect them."

The boy jockey went on to give a brief description of what took place in the gambling hall, adding:

"The fellow must have put the wrong book in my pocket—perhaps his own; here it is. I have not looked into it yet. And here is the paper—"

A blank expression came over the face of True Blue as he failed to find the paper for which he felt. In vain he searched each one of his pockets. The document was gone!

"The furies! he must have stole it while he was searching me!" grated True Blue, angrily; then adding, with a forced calm: "Mr. Blythe, do you happen to know anything of a person named Lucky Coon—"

"Talk of an angel and you'll hear its wings—ahem!" cried a cracked, disagreeable voice, and the door opened to admit—the little snuff-colored man!

True Blue sprung to his feet with an angry cry, but the little brown man calmly waved him back, then drew a note-book from his breast pocket, and extracted therefrom a folded slip of paper, which the boy jockey instantly recognized.

"You were searching for a paper, my young friend—the same which I now hold. I extracted it from your pocket, just ten seconds before I found Frank Holman's stolen pocket-book upon your person!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

LUCULLUS EPPICOON, ESQUIRE.

THE little brown man stood silently laughing at the effect of his speech and unexpected appearance upon the old gentleman and the boy jockey. He had an eye to the dramatic, and the present situation fully gratified that taste.

At the first sound of his voice, True Blue had sprung to his feet and faced the speaker. He recognized the folded slip of paper, and as he did so, there came back to his memory the peculiar smile which that dingy, snuff-colored countenance had worn while its owner was fumbling in his—True Blue's—breast pockets. The solution was easy, now. It was a smile of

triumph at thus easily retrieving his recent defeat, by getting into his own possession the only proof of his attempted bribery.

And yet, why come here to boast of his trickery? to exhibit the written evidence of his own rascality?

The boy jockey did not stop to answer these and other questions that floated across his brain with wondrous rapidity. He saw the proof of his story in the little brown man's hands, and he was not one to let such an opportunity pass him by, unimproved.

With a strong hand he whirled his chair aside and leaped forward as though to grapple with the man who had indirectly accused him of being a thief.

Mr. Lucky Coon plainly believed this to be his intention, for he sprung nimbly aside and backward, thrusting note-book and paper into his bosom, then "put up his fists" with a swift grace that told he was no novice in the manly art of self-defense.

But the boy jockey was playing a surer card than that. He made a second leap, as swift and long as the first, but instead of turning aside to accept the mute challenge of the little brown man, he reached the door, closed it, and then faced Mr. Lucky Coon, a cocked and leveled revolver in his hand.

"Now then," he said, in a low, but clear and resolute tone of voice; "I've got you just where I want you. Who the devil are you, and what do you want here?"

Instead of appearing at all disconcerted, the little snuff-colored man dropped his fists and burst into a hearty laugh—in which he was joined by Henry Blythe, not a little to the boy jockey's surprise.

"It is funny, no doubt, when you see where the laugh comes in," he said, a little sharply. "Mr. Lucky Coon, you will oblige me by handing that paper to Mr. Blythe—"

"Put up your pistol, True," uttered Henry Blythe, as well as he could for laughing. "This gentleman is a particular friend of mine, and if he is the rascal you have been describing—"

The boy jockey turned as white as his sunburnt complexion would admit, and his eyes shone like steel at a white heat as he said, in a forced tone:

"Let me ask you one thing, Mr. Blythe. Is this man in your employ?" nodding toward Mr. Coon.

"Yes—that is—" hesitated the old gentleman.

"Wait a moment. Did you authorize him to visit me and offer me money to lose the race?"

"No, sir—I never thought of such a thing," was the short reply, for the old gentleman was beginning to chafe under the sharp, peremptory tone of the lad.

True Blue drew a long breath as of relief.

"I ask your pardon, sir, for having unjustly suspected you of such an underhand trick, even for a moment. I am very glad you had nothing to do with it, for if you had set him to try me, thereby showing that you were doubtful of my honesty after all I have said, I would not have ridden your filly for all the money there is up on the race."

"Whatever blame there is, must fall upon my shoulders," said the little brown man; "and I will bear it gladly, because through that little trick, I found an honest man—even if I did find Frank Holman's lost purse in your pocket!"

True Blue hardly knew how to resent this reiterated charge. The whole affair was so perplexing that, for the life of him, he could not penetrate the mystery.

"Come, young man," said the stranger. "Take your seat, and I'll explain. If you're not fully satisfied, there is plenty of time to punch my head, afterward."

The boy jockey obeyed, but he turned his chair so that he could easily reach the door, before either of his companions. The little man noticed the fact, and inwardly chuckled as he nodded, approvingly.

"In the first place," he said, speaking rapidly, but in a very different manner from that which has been termed his "impulsive mood," for want of a better term—"I am a detective. My name is Lucullus Eppicoon, though I have substitutes for every day in the month. The one on the card I gave you—'Lucky Coon'—is an old time sobriquet, which I honestly earned; besides, it is only one form of my real name."

"To-day, Mr. Blythe put me on your track, not to watch you, but to watch *over* you. Don't make any mistake. He could not have spoken in higher terms of his own son. But he said that you and he had unscrupulous enemies, whom he did not know, but wished very much to find out."

"For my own satisfaction I resolved to see what you were made of, and so watched you at dinner. If I made a mistake—as I now freely acknowledge—you must blame those beauty-marks upon your face. They made me decide upon finding out how high your price was, and to insure your giving me the chance, I tried to arouse your curiosity, by acting as outlandishly as I well could, without running the risk of being arrested as an escaped lunatic."

"You know what followed. I believed you were swallowing my gilded bait, and I felt

sorry for Mr. Blythe, for I never suspected the truth: that *you* were pulling the wool over *my* eyes. You could have knocked me down with a feather, when you turned upon me as you did, threatening to publish that bit of paper—for it would make me the laughing-stock of the whole country.

"I saw you safe in your room, then set off to find Mr. Blythe, to get an explanatory note from him, so you would listen to me in my real character; but he was out, and when I returned to the hotel, you were gone, no one could tell me where.

"I was searching for you, afraid you had gone to put your threat into execution, when one of my men met me, and made his report. Luck had helped him, and he told me of the plan Holman had concocted, to get you laid by the heels in the jug, until after the big race was over.

"As I couldn't find you, I did the next best thing: shadowed Holman himself. That was an easy job, for he and I are old friends. Easy until toward night, when I soon saw that he was anxious to shake me off.

"I gratified him, after awhile, then began work in earnest, for my man had heard no place named distinctly, and this was my only chance of finding out where the trick was to be played.

"Holman was watching that saloon when Tim and Mike entered it, followed by you. He stepped inside, probably to let them know that they had not mistaken their man, then came out and turned the corner.

"I waited, preferring to follow you. Why didn't I give you a hint of the trap? Well, I never like to spoil business, and if you avoided this trap, they would only set another, about which I might not learn so much beforehand.

"I followed you into the gambling hall, which, by the way, belongs to Holman himself, and his actions there, pressing in beside you and betting heavily *against his own bank*, gave me the one clew I had wanted.

"I fancied he meant to do the trick himself—slip the money into your pocket—but he was too cunning for that. Instead, he slyly handed it to Tim Dorgan, and Tim Dorgan watched his chance and put the book into your tail pocket.

"I pressed forward, intending to remove it, but was too late. Holman raised the alarm, and sprung to guard the door. I felt then that you were fairly caught, and as the only chance I put in my oar.

"Holman and most of those present knew me and my business, and you saw how eagerly he put the affair into my hands. He didn't want to leave you a loophole to crawl through.

"Now—tell me—did you suspect anything?"

"Yes; I felt the book in my pocket, the moment the alarm was raised, and knew that I had been trapped. For I hadn't put anything in that pocket."

"I thought as much," nodded the detective; "from your face. And that is why I looked at you so closely when I invited the thief to step forward and confess. I meant to arrest you, run you in, but to tell the whole story in secret to the officials, and so get you off. But you didn't take the hint, and I had to try another plan.

"You know how it worked. The second man upon your right was Tim Dorgan; the third man on your left was one of my men. In searching him, I slipped his pocketbook up my left coat-sleeve. In searching you, I slipped Holman's pocketbook up my right sleeve, then produced the other, as though it was the one I took from your pocket. The cry I gave made those in the plot believe that all had worked as they desired, and when I put the pocketbook into your hand, bidding you stand aside with the others who had been searched and found innocent, they were so dumbfounded that I saw a chance of improving my first plan. I had made Holman search me first, so I knew I could take the pocketbook with me unsuspected. Dorgan believed that Holman had given him the wrong pocketbook, while Holman thought Tim had made the mistake.

"I purposely stirred up Dorgan, then tripped him up, and made as though I drew the missing property from his bosom. Then I whistled for the men I had stationed outside before entering, and marched off my bird, with the dairies on.

"By that move I killed two birds with one stone. I kept them from learning the truth through mutual explanations, and put a dangerous tool where he will not be able to give us any more trouble. Taken all in all, I think it a tolerably neat job," complacently added Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon.

"What about Tracy Talbot?" asked Henry Blythe, speaking for the first time since the detective began his story.

At that moment there came the sounds of a heavy fall and the loud screams of a woman, from no great distance.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN CUPID'S BOWER.

DESPITE the fact of his being upon his "last legs," Henry Blythe carried as much sail as

he ever had in his palmiest days. To judge from his style of living, there was no bottom to his purse, and so the large majority of people believed. There were only a few who even suspected the truth: that if his debts were paid, the veteran turfman would be hopelessly insolvent. Not more than half a dozen persons knew for certain how close he was sailing to the wind, or that, if one frail anchor failed him, he would surely go to pieces upon the black rocks of disonor.

Not that Henry Blythe was purposely throwing dust in the eyes of the public. He lived as he had been taught—as his fathers had lived before him. He knew no other way to live. He had never denied himself, nor any one belonging to him; the most extravagant fancy was immediately realized. And even now, when he knew that less than two short weeks would, must, decide whether he was to live or die—live on as he always had, or die by his own hand, a doubly dishonored suicide—he never once thought of reducing his expenses, though he was paying an exorbitant rent for an entire floor of the large hotel.

Not far from where Henry Blythe was seated, impatiently waiting for the promised appearance of True Blue, Cora Blythe was entertaining a gentleman visitor, to the evident satisfaction of both parties. They were seated upon a sofa, and could the boy jockey have stolen a glance at them, he would have been reminded of the sight that met his eyes during his ride home from the Park, when the Blythe carriage rolled so swiftly past him.

The parties were the same, and their attitudes but little changed. The same respectful, yet ardent, adoring gaze is bent upon the fair face that slowly, as though reluctantly, sinks before those speaking eyes, longing, yet afraid to read the sweet truth there revealed.

The Blythes and Cravens have been acquainted for many years, and the father of Harvey Craven was the bosom friend and boon companion of Henry Blythe, from their school-boy days up to the time when a self-planted bullet cut the knot the defeated gambler had not the patience to untie.

There was a strange similarity between the two friends, in almost every respect. Both were kind-hearted, generous to prodigality, high livers, and both were passionately addicted to gambling. Their especial passion was for the turf, and the same vein of ill-luck attended them both. But Theodore Craven did not stop there. Between the race meetings he sought the card tables, and unfortunate here as elsewhere, he soon ran through his fortune, and put an end to his own life, rather than struggle hand to hand with poverty.

His father's tragic end was a lesson never forgotten by Harvey Craven, then a fairly-grown lad well along in his teens. Until then, he had been deemed a worthy chip of the old block, who bade fair to follow faithfully in his father's footsteps, but from that day his very nature seemed changed.

He sought and obtained a clerkship in a wholesale grocery, owned by an old friend of his father's.

Henry Blythe was very angry when he learned this, for he had offered the lad a home and a father's love. And when Harvey declined to throw up his situation, he was forbidden the house.

So matters went on for several years. Harvey faithfully performed his duties, and soon gained the respect and love of his employer, who gradually advanced him, until now, seven years from the day on which he entered the dingy store, Harvey was made a partner in the concern, with a one-third share.

Long before this event, Henry Blythe had so far relented as to invite the young man occasionally to his house, and the childish love for each other, which had never entirely died out, was rapidly rekindled in the hearts of Cora and Harvey.

They each felt almost sure that they were beloved in return, but Craven had never allowed his heart to overcome his judgment. He knew Henry Blythe too well to hope that he would consent to bestow his only surviving child upon a grocer's clerk. He knew that he held him disgraced for accepting such a station in life. Never yet had a Blythe been "in trade," and this was the first Craven who had so disgraced his proud lineage.

But now that he was admitted as a partner, Harvey saw a gleam of hope. He knew that Blythe was nearly at the foot of the hill, and foolishly fancied that his extravagant pride would be something humbled: which proved him but a poor student of human nature.

To do him justice, Craven had determined to declare his intentions first of all to Henry Blythe himself, and had visited the hotel with that purpose. But the old gentleman was out, and while awaiting his return, Harvey was entertained by Cora.

It would be a waste of time to attempt an explanation of how he came to change his firm resolve, and whisper the sweet story of his love into the ear of the daughter, instead. That was a foregone conclusion, the moment he trusted himself alone in her presence. The temptation

had been strong enough before, when he knew that to speak would be the death-blow of his hopes. It was irresistible now that he had taken the seal from his lips, and in a soft whisper that was love itself, he told the story Cora had long ago learned by heart.

Yet it was none the less sweetly confusing to her, and her dainty head drooped lower until the ardent lover could no longer gaze into her dear eyes, or read the flattering emotion so vividly painted upon her glowing cheeks.

But he was not to be so easily foiled. He slipped from his seat upon the sofa beside her, and kneeling at her feet, imprisoned both her fluttering hands in one of his, while he gently raised her face with the other.

"Tell me, darling, you are not angry?" he whispered softly, as the downcast eyes still refused to meet his eager gaze. "One glance—that is all I ask."

Slowly, as though yielding to an irresistible power, the long lashes were raised—and then their eyes met.

The precious answer was given in that one glance, and Harvey Craven knew that his dearest hopes were fully realized. But ere he could take advantage of the sweet though silent confession, a sharp, discordant sound broke the delicious spell that bound them both.

A door slammed heavily—a chair appeared to be overturned upon the floor, followed by an angry oath.

Harvey Craven reseated himself upon the sofa, but Cora swiftly removed herself to a chair several yards away and a moment later the unwelcome visitor made his appearance in the doorway which connected the two parlors. It was Alfred Hudson, Cora's cousin.

He strove to appear quite at ease, but as is so often the case, overdid the matter, and thus revealed what he sought to conceal. Plainer than words his manner told the lovers that he had surprised their secret, and Cora turned pale with a vague fear.

Hudson's discovery had been the result of pure accident, and may be readily explained.

For years he had been in love with Cora Blythe, and had told her as much, a dozen times, but with a true woman's tact, she had warded off the danger.

A wild, reckless and headstrong youth, who had never known a mother's care or a sister's love, he had not been bettered by coming into possession of a large sum of money, which was placed wholly at his own disposal. But of this, more hereafter.

He often said, and only spoke the truth, that Cora was the good angel whose influence alone kept him from entirely going to the bad. Believing this, she had treated him more considerately than was, perhaps, judicious.

Henry Blythe looked upon him indulgently, as being much what he himself had been at the same age. He did not wish him for a son-in-law, because he hated the father too cordially, but he encouraged his visits.

On that evening, Alfred Hudson resolved to know his fate, and characteristically braced his nerves with a liberal quantity of liquor. Though he was not drunk, he had taken more than he intended, to which fact the catastrophe which followed must be attributed.

He found the servant whose duty it was to announce callers, off guard, and with his usual freedom, entered the outer parlor, where he expected to find his cousin.

The room was empty, and with a natural wish to appear at his best upon such a momentous occasion, he approached a full length mirror for the purpose of arranging his hair, and settling his collar. The thick carpet gave forth no sound, and then—

In the mirror he saw a reflection of the sofa—saw Harvey Craven upon his knees before the maiden whom he had come prepared to court—and then he saw their eyes meet in a long, ardent gaze of love!

Young Hudson had always acted upon impulse, and he did so now. Hastily retreating to the door, he opened and then slammed it. In turning around, he struck his knee against a chair, and with an angry oath, kicked it half-way across the room.

Cora saw at a glance that there was something wrong, and in a moment more she discovered the truth, as her eyes fell upon the tell-tale mirror. In the confusion of this discovery, she helped on rather than averted the unpleasant scene which followed.

Craven arose and bowed, but Hudson, not returning the salute, pushed past him so rudely as to cause them both to stagger. Hudson eagerly grasped the occasion.

"Better stick to your shop, unless you can learn to handle yourself less awkwardly, young man. You are out of place in a lady's parlor."

Harvey turned white with anger, and instinctively clenched his fists, but remembering in whose presence he stood, turned away in silence.

He could not have chosen a more irritating course. Hudson felt himself in the wrong, and that urged him on.

"Craven by name, and doubly a craven by nature! A pity such poor upstarts are allowed to come into respectable society!"

Until now Cora had stood confounded, but with a womanly instinct she sprung forward between the two men, who were angrily confronting each other. But Hudson saw only too plainly where her sympathies lay, and grasped her by the arm to put her aside.

It was an unlucky move for him. The lover's arm shot out, and Hudson went down in a nerveless heap, while Cora, terrified, uttered scream after scream for help.

CHAPTER XX.

CLEARING THE FIELD OF BATTLE.

THESE were the sounds that so startled Henry Blythe and his two visitors, cutting short whatever answer might have been given to his question concerning the mysterious Tracy Talbot.

The sounds came from one of the rooms across the corridor, and Mr. Blythe had no difficulty in recognizing the voice of his daughter.

Moved by the same impulse, the trio hastened toward the spot, but the oldest and least active was first, a father's love more than counterbalancing the disadvantages of age.

It was a dramatic scene which awaited them the moment they passed the outer door—a scene which was faithfully reproduced by the tell-tale mirror, and for a brief space held them one and all spellbound.

A foppishly-dressed young man was lying upon the floor of the inner room, the doorway of which formed a frame to the picture which seemed painted upon the polished glass. He was just raising himself upon one elbow, the other hand outstretched and grasping a pistol. Blood was trickling down his face and over his linen. A fierce, deadly hatred was written upon his every feature. For the time being he was transformed into a veritable devil of revenge.

Opposite stood another man, a woman's arms wound around his neck as she frantically resisted his gentle but firm efforts to put her aside, out of the line of the threatened shot.

Such was the tale the mirror told.

Here it was that the wild-life training of the boy jockey stood all parties concerned in good stead. While Henry Blythe stood as though petrified, and even the detective hesitated, True Blue darted forward, through the connecting doorway, and pounced upon Alfred Hudson much as a saucy kingbird assails a sulky crow.

It was fortunate for Harvey Craven that his blow had been so firmly planted. Almost blinded for the time being, young Hudson had been unable to catch anything like a certain aim, and when Cora, woman-like, seeing only the danger of him she loved, sprung between the two, he dared not risk an uncertain shot, even in the height of his jealous fury.

Thus it came that True Blue was in time to prevent the burning of powder, though there was not a breath of time to spare.

Knowing from experience how apt a cocked firearm is to be discharged in a struggle, the boy jockey, in grasping the leveled weapon, took care to cover the nipple with his hand. Hudson pulled trigger at the same instant, and the hammer fell, sinking the nipple deep into True Blue's palm, but he never flinched. His fingers closed around the weapon and gave it a sudden twist, while his left hand grasped Hudson's wrist and turned it violently in the opposite direction, disarming him with apparent ease.

"Neat a job as ever I saw!" cried Mr. Eppicooon, with an approving nod. "You'd be a credit to the force—"

As no one appeared to heed his words, the little snuff-colored man did not deem it worth while to finish his sentence, but hearing the sounds of hasty footsteps advancing along the corridor, he hurried back to the door of the outer room, just in time to bar the entrance of several servants, who had been alarmed by the piercing screams of the terrified maiden.

"There's nothing the matter," he said, blandly. "The lady got frightened at a mouse—nothing more. Good-evening—don't let me keep you waiting."

With a low bow, he closed the door in their faces and turned the key in the lock, then leisurely returned to the connecting doorway.

Cora had released her lover, but still stood near him, pale and trembling. Alfred Hudson had arisen, and was now wiping the blood from his face. True Blue had recocked the pistol, but was glancing from one face to another, unheeding his wounded hand, from which the blood was dropping to the floor. Craven was standing with downcast eyes, more agitated now than when he confronted the leveled pistol of his angry rival, for he knew that his fate depended upon the next few minutes.

"Alfred Hudson," said Henry Blythe, in a cold, stern voice; "if you cannot come here and behave yourself, the best thing you can do is to stay away."

By no means the words he meant to utter, but the poor old gentleman had been completely unstrung by the screams of his idolized child, and scarcely knew what he did say.

"He knocked me down!" muttered Hudson, with a bitter, vengeful glance toward Harvey Craven.

"No doubt you deserved all you got—and more, too! You get drunk, and then come here

and make a pot-house of my rooms. There—don't tell me! The bad blood is in you, or you wouldn't be your father's son. Take your hat and go—or by the Lord that made me! I'll give you in charge for disturbing the peace! When you sober off, you can come back and apologize."

The last sentence was added after a brief pause, as though the old gentleman feared he had been a little hasty in thus giving judgment before hearing any of the facts of the case.

"I will go, without your wasting any more breath over it, Mr. Blythe," said the young man, in a tone of forced coldness. "But one word with you, Mr. Harvey Craven. You struck me a coward's blow, when I was not looking for it. What you are, we all know, but as you are suffered to mingle in the society of ladies and gentlemen, on the strength of your father's name, for the time being I will treat you as though you really were a gentleman. A friend will wait upon you in my behalf, early to-morrow morning."

"I suppose you are hinting at a challenge," quietly responded Craven. "If so, you may spare your friend that trouble. You, or any other man will always find me ready to defend myself, if attacked, but whoever bears me a challenge to fight a duel, will find my foot is quite as heavy as you found my hand."

Young Hudson was about to reply hotly, but Henry Blythe interfered just in time.

"Not another word, sir," he cried, sternly, grasping the arm of his nephew and forcing him to follow. "With your quarrels outside, I have nothing to do, but I will have no more brawling here. There's the door. Go—and don't come back again until you can act as a gentleman should act in the presence of a lady."

Thoroughly sobered by what had occurred, Alfred Hudson obeyed, leaving the room without a word. Henry Blythe watched him until the door closed behind him, then turned the key again, and retraced his steps to the inner parlor, an ominous frown corrugating his brow.

Harvey Craven read his fate in that stern look, but his courage was equal to the emergency, and he never quailed as the old gentleman paused before him, a mocking smile upon his lips, strangely contrasting with the anger written above.

"Allow me to thank you, sir, for turning my parlors into a boxing-school. Your father was my dearest friend, and my respect for his name and memory will cover much, but when it comes to such disgraceful conduct—"

"Papa—don't!" sobbed Cora, flinging her arms around his neck. "Don't blame him—it was not his fault. Cousin Alfred was so rude—and he did hurt me—"

"Allow me to explain, Mr. Blythe," said Craven, in a firm, though perfectly respectful tone. "Mr. Hudson had evidently been drinking, before he came in, for his first action was to insult me, without any just cause or provocation upon my part. I made him no reply, when he repeated the insult, and would have struck me, when Miss Blythe came between us. He caught her by the arm as though to push or fling her aside. She cried out, as I believed with pain, and then I knocked him down—just as you yourself would have done under similar provocation."

"But he must have had some cause—something to anger him—" began Mr. Blythe, but stopped short as he caught sight of the sudden wave of color that spread over the pale, tear-stained face of his daughter.

A suspicion of the truth flashed upon his mind, and quickly turning, he glanced through the open doorway. He saw his own figure plainly reflected in the large mirror, and the suspicion became conviction.

He remembered what he himself had seen in the glass, and the conduct of young Hudson was explained—though by no means to his satisfaction.

Strange as it may appear, he had never once suspected the possibility of there being any love passages between his daughter and this man who had disgraced his race by working for a living. He had suffered his visits—and even encouraged them, in hopes of leading Harvey to see the error of his ways, but he believed his child far too proud to look kindly upon a grocer's clerk.

The lovers saw his glance at the mirror, and only too easily read the swift change which came over his features. Cora shrunk back in pale and trembling fear, but Harvey appeared to gain fresh courage.

"I see you have discovered the reason, sir," he said, speaking with a rapidity that defied interruption. "You must have expected something like this. We have been thrown together from childhood. You have encouraged my visits—"

His speech was cut short by the angry old gentleman.

"D—n it, sir! because one is civil to you on your father's account, must you think that one is flinging one's daughter at your head?"

With a low cry, half of terror, half of shame, Cora crept to her father's side, and buried her face in his bosom, as Craven quietly added:

"Sir, until now you have treated me as a gentleman. I have never tried to conceal my

real feelings from you, and as you still suffered my visits, I had a right to think that they were not disagreeable to you. I came here to-night, to ask your permission to plead my cause with your daughter, but you were out. While waiting for your return, I—my heart got the better of my resolution, and I confessed my love—a love that will never die while my heart beats."

During this scene, True Blue had been growing more and more uneasy, and at this juncture he touched the little brown man upon the shoulder.

"I reckon we'd better skin out o' this, old man!" he said in a husky whisper; but as they stole unobserved from the room, they heard Cora say, between sobs:

"And I—I love him—so dearly, papa!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TRUTH ABOUT TRACY TALBOT.

"'Twas done as neat as though they had been practicing it all their lives in a theater," said Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon, as the parlor door closed behind them. "Persecuted lovers and a stern parent, who wastes a vast deal of breath in swearing that he will never forgive them, but who always ends by bee-lessing his cheelidurn, and all are made forever happy by that act of bald-faced perjury. Though the *finale* is so assured, you might have let me see the play out, young man, in my capacity as friend of the family."

"It was a private affair, and we had no right to hang around as long as we did," shortly replied the boy jockey.

"It don't matter now. We're on the wrong side of the door, and can't go back to give them an *encore*. But I know just how it will end. The old gentleman is so soft-hearted, and dotes so on the girl, that she will just twist him around her finger. He will gradually simmer down, and when the party breaks up there will be a wedding on the programme."

True Blue visibly winced at this confident prediction, and Mr. Eppicoon stared at him in open-eyed astonishment, as a glimmer of the truth struck him. But this idea was so preposterous that the detective instantly smothered it. Not so quickly, however, but that True Blue read his glance aright, and caught at the first straw as he instinctively sought to guard his foolish secret.

"What did Mr. Blythe mean by that question? Do you know any thing about Tracy Talbot?"

"Well—yes. I think I may say I do," was the provokingly deliberate response. "There are not many persons now living who have better cause—but I don't care about discussing private affairs in such a public place; and then I'm too hungry. I was so busy hunting after you, that I didn't stop for supper. If you will come along, I know of a snug place not far from here, where we can be comfortable—"

True Blue made an impatient sign for his talkative companion to move on. All else was forgotten in his burning desire to learn something definite concerning the man whom he had reason to believe was his father, and who, thus far, had avoided his search like a veritable will-o-the-wisp.

The detective regarded this impatience indulgently, and as he really was very hungry, he led the way out of the hotel and down the street at a rapid pace.

A few minutes brought them to a small, dingy-looking restaurant. Entering with the air of one well accustomed to the place, Eppicoon quickly gave his orders, then passed on to a private apartment at the rear of the building.

"A shabby-looking shell," he said, seating himself at the small, round table, and motioning the boy jockey to do likewise. "But their *cuisine* is superb, and their liquors simply divine. I always treat myself to a supper here, after I have done a neat piece of work; and I never think of the place without wishing I had a dozen stomachs, each one so big that it would take a month to fill it respectably!"

"But what about Tracy Talbot?" repeated True Blue, as the little snuff-colored man paused, smacking his lips.

"So much that I don't care about beginning the story until after I have had my supper. But you can tell me what *you* know about him, and what your reasons are for hunting him up. Old Blythe hinted at it, but didn't say much. You can talk while I am eating."

As the shortest way of getting at what he wanted, the boy jockey complied, and gave a hasty outline of his life-history, dwelling more at length upon the story told him by "Dan the Devil." At the approach of the servant he would cease, then continue, finishing his statement long before the detective had eaten his fill.

Once or twice during the narration, Mr. Eppicoon nodded shortly, as though in confirmation, and it was plain that he felt deeply interested, despite the counter-attraction of the appetizing viands before him. A strong proof of this was given when, without waiting to finish his supper, he began:

"I can tell you pretty much all about Tracy

Talbot, for I secured him a permanent situation—in State's Prison!"

True Blue uttered a sharp exclamation, but almost immediately suppressed his emotion, and signed the little snuff-colored man to continue.

"It was some sixteen years ago that my attention was first drawn toward this Tracy Talbot, though I little thought at the time that he was to give me my first upward step in professional life—for I was then at the foot of the ladder, and was looking out for my first case."

"Talbot was not long in gaining quite a reputation as a sport and fast man in general. He appeared to have plenty of money, and did have no end of nerve and cheek. A cooler hand at 'bluff' I never met—but never mind that," said Eppicoon, with a little sigh, as though the memory thus called up was by no means a pleasant one.

"Being a gambler was no drawback to one's claim upon society, in those days; rather the contrary. His high playing and general reputation of being a dangerous fellow in every way, only made him a greater favorite among the women; high and low. I dare say the fellow could have had his choice of all, for the simple asking. But that don't matter, either."

"After he had been here nearly a year, it began to be whispered about that Talbot had really slipped his head into a golden noose; that he was about to marry a beautiful, rich and highly connected young lady, the only daughter of our congressman, at that time."

"The rumor was a true one. Grand preparations were made for the wedding—which never took place."

"Only the day before that on which they were to be married, Talbot was out riding with his betrothed bride. There was some grand doings going on—a procession of some kind, and their buggy, with a lot of others, was blocked up until the procession could pass by."

"Here, where he could neither advance nor retreat, a woman, with a child in her arms, tackled the happy bridegroom elect, calling him her lawful husband, holding up the child to recognize its papa, and in short making a regular theater of the street."

"Everybody knew the couple in the buggy, and that they were to be married soon, so you can imagine the sensation when the strange woman claimed him as her husband."

"Talbot turned white as ashes. The lady with him shrieked as though stabbed to the heart, and then fell back like a corpse. At that Talbot struck his horse with the whip, and tore through the procession as though the people before his wheels were but clods of dirt."

"That evening he reappeared among his usual companions, as cool as a cucumber. He said that the woman was undoubtedly crazy, and had mistaken him for some other person. That he had given her in charge of the police, with orders to thoroughly investigate the matter. And every one who heard him believed he was speaking the truth; he was so cool and composed, and so freely expressed his pity and sympathy for the poor, unfortunate creature who had mistaken him for her husband, Dan Filkins."

"The senator happened to be at home, and as it proved, his doubts were not so easily set at rest. He had known my father quite well, and sent for me to investigate the matter. I was to trace up the history of Tracy Talbot prior to his coming here, and find out just what and who he was."

"At almost the first move I made, I found my bird had flown—had left town early on the morning after assuring his friends of his innocence."

"This renewed my suspicions, and I altered my plans, following him, instead. It was no easy task, and do my best I couldn't catch up with him, though I stuck to his hot trail like a true bloodhound, and all his doublings and turnings couldn't shake me off."

"It was just one week after the job was put in my hands that I came back here, one train later than Tracy Talbot. He was the same cool hand; telling everybody that he had been away in quest of papers and affidavits to prove that he was not Dan Filkins, but Tracy Talbot."

"Everybody appeared to believe his story, backed up as it was by a trunk full of papers, including both marriage and birth certificates, together with affidavits covering every year back to his childhood."

"He even satisfied the senator, and when I went to report, the old gentleman paid me liberally, and told me that my services were no longer necessary."

"I didn't think so. I firmly believed there was a nigger in the woodpile, and resolved to stick to the matter, and work it up for my own satisfaction."

"As the most likely chance, I began hunting for the woman and child who had created such a sensation, and right there I struck oil."

"I found that Tracy Talbot had told a lie in saying he had given the woman in charge. She had never been arrested, nor did any one of the force know anything more about her than what they had heard through the papers, or the gossip upon the streets."

"I set to work in good earnest, then, resolved

to search every house in town but what I either found her, or some trace to tell me which way she had gone.

"I spent three days and nights in this manner, but altogether without success. I began to think that I had lost my chance, when word was brought to the station that the body of a young woman had been found in the river.

"At first we believed it was that of Mrs. —, another person who was missing, and as the word spread, a large crowd quickly gathered at the wharf where the body had been moored. But it wasn't the one we thought. I'll tell you about that some other time. It will interest you, even if it don't concern Tracy Talbot.

"The body was dragged out upon the wharf. It had not been in the water very long, and was not much disfigured. At first no one appeared to recognize the features, and I was about turning away, when a man pushed through the crowd, and after one look, loudly declared that it was the body of the woman who had claimed Tracy Talbot as her husband!

"And a moment after, it was found that she had been stabbed to the heart with some sharp instrument!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A SHOT 'TWIXT WIND AND WATER.

THE boy jockey, who had thus far listened to the words of the detective wholly unmoved, at least to the outward eye, now dropped his head upon his arms as they rested upon the table, hiding his face with a low, stifled cry.

He firmly believed that this man and woman were his father and mother, and though he had known little or nothing of them in life, he could not hear of their crimes and sufferings totally unmoved.

Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon paused short in his story, as though desirous of giving his auditor time to recover his wonted composure. This was what the boy jockey believed, and he felt grateful toward the little snuff-colored man for his consideration.

Had he been able to catch a glimpse of the detective's face at that moment, True Blue would hardly have felt the same. There was a malicious grin upon the little brown man's features, a laughing devil in his eyes, that betokened but scant sympathy for the lad before him.

In a few moments True Blue uplifted his head, a faint, forced smile upon his lips, as he said:

"He killed her—go on. Don't mind me, I was taken by surprise. Somehow, I never have thought of her—of my mother—as dead. I always dreamed I should find her—some time, and that we would make it all up to each other. Well, that is past. Go on."

Either Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon was really affected by the simple pathos of these short, broken sentences, or else he was an admirable actor, having complete control of all his features. The moment the boy jockey lifted his head, that look of malicious amusement vanished and gave place to an expression of grave sympathy.

"The moment it was found that the woman had been murdered, the same suspicion struck me that you gave expression to just now: that Tracy Talbot had killed her, as the shortest and surest method of getting out of the scrape he had fallen into. But, after all, it was nothing but suspicion, and I knew that I would only get laughed at, were I to apply for a warrant to arrest him, on such frail grounds.

"Still, I was resolved to get to the bottom of the mystery, if it cost me every cent I had in the world. My pride was fairly aroused, and I went into the matter for all I was worth.

"Within that same hour, I was at Tracy Talbot's heels, shadowing him. I was resolved to lose no chances, and while keeping one eye upon my bird, I wrote two notes and posted them the first time Talbot left his hotel. Those notes were directed to two men whom I knew I could trust implicitly to carry out whatever orders I gave them, so long as their pay was prompt and liberal enough.

"Both of them promptly answered my call, and giving them leave to fix their own terms, I set them to work. Their duty was to watch every step Tracy Talbot took, mark every person he spoke to, get a sight of his letters, if possible, and above all, to keep him from leaving town before I was ready for him. If he attempted it, they were to arrest him upon some fictitious charge, and hold him while they sent word to me.

"They were to alter their appearance each day, so that he would not grow alarmed at finding himself watched. I knew that they were equal to the task, for surer 'shadows' or more artistic makers-up, never belonged to the force. So I set about my own work, feeling sure that Mr. Talbot would not be missing when I wanted to put my hand on him.

"The first thing I did was to hunt up the man who had recognized the body. That was an easy job. He was an old citizen, and known to almost everybody.

"He kept a quiet, respectable boarding-house in the upper end of town, and was doing a com-

fortable business, growing rich hand over fist. He appeared very glad to see me when I spoke about the dead woman, but I soon found out the reason. She was in debt for a week's board when she left the place, and the old hunks struck me for the money, first thing, when I introduced myself as a distant relative of the dead woman.

"That was more than I had bargained for, but I paid the money, and charged it to the account I had opened with Tracy Talbot.

"The old man told me all he knew. The woman had come to his house nearly a week before the scene upon the street, and as he hesitated about taking her and her child in, she produced a letter signed by a minister of the gospel, which stated that Mrs. Daniel Filkins was a member of his church, and a worthy woman in every respect.

"The old fellow gave me this letter, and in it I saw the first strand of the rope that was to hang my game. He told me when she was last at the house; the evening before Tracy Talbot left town, in quest of proofs of his identity. He said she had been greatly agitated by the receipt of a note which a strange lad delivered, and almost immediately after left the house—hastening to meet her death, as it proved.

"That same evening I took the train for the little town from which the letter of recommendation had come, and soon managed to learn all about Mrs. Daniel Filkins, for she had been born and raised there.

"Filkins had spent one summer in the place, for the benefit of his health, as he said, and it being a little country town, and he a well-dressed, good-looking, plausible rascal, with pockets full of money and a generous taste for spending it, of course he had it pretty much all his own way, and was looked up to, especially by the girls, as being only a trifle lower than the angels.

"Well, before fall came, the angel was married, and took his bride away upon a bridal tour. They wrote home to the old folks quite frequently, and appeared to be in the seventh heaven of delight; but all at once there came a change. And a month later, the young wife returned home—deserted, just as she was about to become a mother.

"Well, I secured a few letters written by Mr. Filkins, and got a dozen different persons to describe his personal appearance, then hastened here to see how my men were performing their duty.

"Would you believe it? I might just as well have kept my money in my pocket. Not that the boys didn't perform their duties faithfully, but Tracy Talbot had not shown the slightest desire to run away. On the contrary, he had voluntarily appeared at the inquest, and swore that he had never to his knowledge ever met the deceased woman before she assaulted him upon the street, claiming him as her husband.

"He told such a straight story, and showed so many papers and affidavits to prove that all he said was true, that both the press and people began to believe that he was perfection personified. He was a greater favorite than ever. Another date was set for the postponed wedding, and I began to think that the wisest thing I could do would be to drop the case where it stood. The dead woman could not be injured any more, and the living would hardly be thankful for having their eyes opened, after matters had gone so far.

"But before I had made up my mind, the matter was settled for me, by a note which a policeman brought me, from a fellow, who, with two others, had been arrested on suspicion of being concerned in an extensive robbery of dry-goods from a warehouse up the river. The note said the writer had important information to give, and begged me to lose no time in calling.

"I did call, and was richly repaid for doing so.

"The fellow told me he could explain how the woman had come to her death, if I would assure him that what he said would not be used to his prejudice at his trial. I promised to do my best, and as the proof was overwhelming against them anyhow, he made a clean breast of it.

"The time they had chosen was early Sunday evening, as the situation was retired, and they meant to make a wholesale job of it. But before they got fairly to work, the sound of voices drawing near, put them upon their guard. And from their hiding-place they saw all that followed.

"A man and woman were talking earnestly; so earnestly that the hidden thieves could distinguish every word that was spoken. Two of the three were well acquainted with Tracy Talbot, being broken-down gamblers; and the other one had seen the woman when she claimed the man as her husband.

"To make a long story short, they heard Tracy Talbot admit that she was his lawful wife; heard him offer her money to go away and leave him in peace until he could get hold of the fortune for which he was playing, when he swore he would at once return to her. But she would not listen to it.

"And then, before they could raise a hand to interfere, the cowardly villain had stabbed her

and hurled her backward into the river, then ran swiftly away.

This was all pie to me, as you may guess, and as I had taken care to have a responsible witness with me, I found no trouble in getting a warrant out for the arrest of Tracy Talbot, on the charge of willful murder. That same night he slept in jail—if he slept at all.

"There's no need of my going over the trial, bit by bit I can show it to you in print, whenever you feel like reading it. Enough that Tracy Talbot was tried and in the end found guilty of murder. I had a dozen witnesses up from the country town, and they proved beyond a doubt that he was the same Dan Filkins who married the murdered woman.

"He was sentenced to be hung, but the execution was postponed, and finally the Governor was induced to commute the sentence of death to imprisonment for life."

"You have said nothing about the child," slowly uttered True Blue, his face pale and haggard.

"I've been expecting that question all along," said the detective, that strange smile returning to his face. "You feel sure that you are—or were—that child?"

"If Dan Clark told me the truth—yes."

"Well," and the little snuff-colored man chuckled, as though hugely tickled. "Well, I hardly see how that can be; for at least two reasons. The first reason is: at the time of the murder, that child was less than one year old; the second is: that the baby was a girl! Taking them both together, I hardly think that you can justly claim to be that child!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

BACK INTO THE DARKNESS.

THE little snuff-colored man leaned back in his chair, a self-satisfied smile playing around his oily mouth as he watched the effect of his double shot upon the boy jockey. Even his taste for the dramatic was fully gratified. His unexpected disclosure had fairly stunned True Blue, since it told him he was further than ever from solving the mystery which enshrouded his earlier days.

"That girl-child is still living in town. I can show her to you almost any time. And as I can swear to her being the child left by the woman whom Tracy Talbot, or Dan Filkins, murdered, you will have to look further for your parents."

"Your are sure there can be no mistake?" slowly.

"About the child? not at all. Mrs. F. left her as well as the board-bill behind her, when she went to keep the appointment made by Tracy Talbot. Since then I have kept an eye upon the child—but that don't matter. I've got still another point. You say your man was tall and dark complexioned. Now my Tracy Talbot—the one I hunted down—was just the contrary. He was short and slender, slight build as a fine lady; and he had a head of the reddest hair I ever saw clapped upon the pate of a two-legged mortal—"

True Blue with difficulty suppressed the cry that rose in his throat at these words, for he believed he began to see his way through the perplexing shadows that had beset his search so thickly.

Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon stopped short in his speech as he noticed the strong agitation of his companion, and stared inquiringly at the boy jockey.

"Let me put it in shape, first, then you tell me what you think about it," said True Blue, forcing himself to speak with calm deliberation.

Dan Clark told me all I know of Tracy Talbot. He was a stranger to the man, and only heard the name applied to him while in a crowd of betters, until he heard the name spoken while he was listening at the hole in the partition wall, waiting to rob the man who had robbed him. There were two men in the room when he entered, one awake, the other asleep. The sleeping man had bright red hair. The other was tall and dark. The last one hired Dan to do the job, and called himself—or at least, signed his name as Tracy Talbot. Now give me your opinion."

If your man, Dan Clark, told you the truth, the riddle is easy enough read. The red-haired man was Tracy Talbot. The other fellow took his name and story to cover up his tracks, in case Clark should make a botch of the job. If Dan got into trouble, he would naturally lay the blame upon Tracy Talbot.

"That is one view of the matter; but are you quite sure that Dan Clark told you the whole truth?"

True Blue felt assured that Dan the Devil had concealed nothing from him, and said as much.

The detective's brows contracted a little, and the old, cunning gleam came into his eyes again; but if he was not satisfied, he kept his doubts to himself.

"There is only one way for us to find out the actual truth of the matter," said the boy jockey, after a brief pause. "The real Tracy Talbot alone can help us. He must know who occupied the room with him on that night—it is hardly probable that he could have forgotten such a queer incident, even in the midst of his own

troubles. He would surely tell us the man's real name, if properly approached.

"It would be easier for you to gain access to him than for me. Name your price; and I will double it, gladly, if you return with the true clew."

"You ask me to go to Tracy Talbot, and find out from him the real name of the man. Well," and the detective laughed, dryly; "I hardly think you would be willing to pay my price, and I doubt greatly whether I would be able to find the gentleman so readily as you appear to think."

"You said he was in State's prison—"

"Exactly; I helped to put him there. But he changed his quarters, some four years ago—"

"Pardon out—set at liberty?"

"By the hand of death—yes."

The blow was a doubly bitter one, from its being so totally unexpected, and the boy jockey, for the time being, was completely unmanned.

If the real Tracy Talbot was dead, the secret of the past was buried in the grave with him. The last hope was gone, and the solemn vow of the boy jockey would never be carried out.

Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon appeared to look upon the matter as nothing but a huge jest. The laughing devil was dancing in his snuff-colored eyes, and his whole form shook with secret mirth. But the instant True Blue raised his head, these mirthful symptoms gave place to a preternatural gravity.

"That lets me out, then," said the boy jockey, with a sickly, forced smile. "It's no more than my old luck. I was a fool to think of ever escaping it."

"I don't agree with you there," said the detective, with a quiet assurance that caused the boy jockey's pulse to beat quicker, though he could not have told why. "To my eyes, the case looks prettier than ever, and with your permission, I'll take hold of it in good earnest."

"In the first place, I feel pretty confident that your man Dan has kept back the most important portion of his confession, probably because he was afraid of your casting him adrift, in case you learned the real extent of his crime. You say he is wholly blind?" with a sudden alteration of tone and manner.

True Blue nodded, too puzzled for words.

"Good enough! It will be no hard matter to get at the truth, then, if no other way offers. But mind. If I am to take hold of this job, you must let me take my time, and do the work after my own fancy. Do you agree to this?"

"You are keeping something back—you know more than you have told me—"

"I will tell you this; you must trust me wholly, or not at all. If you have patience and faith, you shall know as much as I do—but you must let me choose my own time for making the revelation. If this don't suit you, I wash my hands of the whole affair," said the detective, in a short, sharp tone.

There was too much at stake for True Blue to throw away the faintest chance, and, with a meekness quite foreign to his usual nature, he replied:

"I meant no offense. If you see the slightest hope of getting to the bottom of this miserable tangle, I will pay your own price. But don't try to raise any hopes that you know you can't satisfy."

"If I knew anything positive, I would not keep it from you a moment; but there it is. I fancy I have got hold of a fair clew, but after all it may *only* be a fancy. As you say, I won't raise false hopes. I promise to do the best I know how, and the moment I am satisfied I am following the wrong trail, I will tell you as much."

"To begin with, you must treat Dan Clark just the same as usual. Don't ask him any questions about the past. You must promise me this."

True Blue gave the required pledge, and then the detective arose with the air of one thoroughly satisfied with himself and the world in general. He settled his bill, and they both left the restaurant.

"I'll walk with you to the hotel," he said, linking arms. "The old gentleman pays me liberally for keeping an eye upon you, and I must earn my money, you know. Holman & Co. will hardly rest satisfied with what they have done—or attempted. You must keep your eye skinned, for I verily believe you are in more danger here than you would be out among the Indians."

These words came back to True Blue with redoubled force, as he parted from his queer and new-made friend, and ran lightly up the hotel steps, where a shock-headed, ragged lad eagerly greeted him.

"Please, boss, Little Joe says you must come to him, right off—not to wait a minnit, or mebbe you'll be too late."

As he spoke, the boy cast a quick, suspicious glance around, as though he was afraid of being overheard. But there were few persons in the office, and none of them were within earshot.

The demeanor of the lad was so peculiar, that True Blue looked at him keenly, his suspicions deepening with each passing moment.

"Where is Little Joe?" he demanded, sharply.

"He told me to fetch you—it's off a long ways."

This hesitating reply did not tend to reassure the boy jockey, and he recalled the detective's warning.

"If it's so far, it is too late to go there tonight. Tell me where I can find him, and I'll be there the first thing in the morning. Can't you speak out?"

The lad was shifting uneasily from one foot to the other, and casting a sidelong glance down the steps leading to the street, as though meditating a hasty retreat. True Blue saw this, and grasped the boy by the shoulder as he spoke.

"He told me not to tell nobody," whined the gutter-snipe, twisting uneasily under the boy jockey's grasp; "'nd I couldn't tell you so you could find the way, mister. But I kin take you there. 'Nd Little Joe, he said you must come right off, 'less you'd be too late."

"What did he want to see me about?"

"Bout ridin' the big race, I reckon. I don't know no more," the lad added, sulkily. "I was to fetch you to him, an' he said I mustn't answer no questions."

True Blue no longer had any doubt. He believed that the lad had been sent to decoy him into another trap, for how could Little Joe know anything about his intention of riding for the Cup.

Still holding the lad firmly, he led him down the stairs and out upon the street, then turned him about and dealt him a kick that fairly lifted the fellow from his feet. Bidding him take that to his employers, he reentered the hotel, satisfied with his own prudence for once.

He hastened up to his rooms, worn and weary with the bodily and mental fatigue he had undergone during the past two days; but he was destined to have no rest that night. He found Dan Clark tossing uneasily upon the bed, muttering incoherently, delirious with a raging fever.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SHADOWS THROUGH THE MIST.

AFTER the storm, follows a calm.

During the last six and thirty hours, life for our young hero had been one constant whirl of excitement and adventure. From the moment that his keen eye had penetrated the clumsy mask worn by English Tom and his fellow rascals—from the moment that the gray filly Aphrodite sped under the wire with flying reins, to all appearances doomed to self-destruction—the boy jockey had known no rest either of body or mind. Adventure had trod upon adventure's heels, until True Blue no longer had occasion to sigh for the free and easy life of the mountains and plains.

But after this—after he found his blind and crippled comrade, Dan Clark, tossing and moaning in a high fever—there came a lull. Day after day dragged by, as quiet and uninteresting as those immediately preceding them had been crowded with excitement and novelty, nor was True Blue at all ungrateful for the change. His tensely strained nerves needed the rest, for he felt that the time was coming when he would require all his powers of mind and body, in order to pluck fortune out of the fire—to safely land the high stakes for which he was racing.

The events of that week of quietness can be briefly recorded.

In the first place, the illness of Dan Clark increased, rather than moderated. There appeared to be no specific disease, nor did the fever take any definite form. The physicians who were called in to attend him, appeared to be puzzled by the case at first, but finally decided that it was but the harbinger of a general breaking up of the blind cripple's constitution.

This was no news to True Blue. He knew that "Dan the Devil" had never recovered from the terrible accident that left him such a pitiful wreck. His span of life would have ended long ere this, only for the tender care and nursing of the lad he had so bitterly wronged in years gone by. And that care and attention was redoubled now. Not through love for the patient, altogether. True Blue was but mortal, and he could not forget that Dan Clark had altered the whole course of his—the youth's—life. But he believed that through the blind cripple alone could he ever bring home the truth to the door of the man who had assumed the name and story of Tracy Talbot for the furtherance of his own evil ends, and in that belief he watched over and cared for the sick man as tenderly as though he had been flesh of his flesh.

Not alone. Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon resolved to earn the high wages paid him by Henry Blythe, and spent the greater part of his time in company with True Blue, for the first day or two after their confidential interview in the private parlor of the little dingy restaurant.

Then his tactics changed. He insisted upon sharing the care of Dan Clark, and when True Blue looked at him in doubting wonder, the little snuff-colored man coolly declared that Henry Blythe had hired him to act as nurse, so that he, True Blue, might the better fit himself for the great race.

The boy jockey felt that there was something working beneath the surface, but he did not attempt to probe the mystery. He had not yet

entirely recovered from the double shock received upon that night. With the death of Tracy Talbot, he felt that the last clew to his past life was severed. And—though I really hate to say as much, though it is undeniably true—the scene he had witnessed in Henry Blythe's parlors had unmanned him for the time being. Folly though he knew it to be, the boy jockey had fallen over head and ears in love with dainty Cora Blythe, and had built more than one vague castle in the air which he and she were to occupy, after he had piloted the gray filly Aphrodite to victory in the coming race. His eyes were opened, that evening, and the castles crumbled into dust, never again to be erected, for he saw that there was only one man in the world for Cora Blythe—and that was Harvey Craven. Nevertheless, the blow was a bitter one, and for a day or two, he pined and moped like a love-sick school-boy.

Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon furnished the needed antidote when he urged True Blue to work off his surplus flesh, against the race. And day by day the boy jockey began to recover his usual good sense under this practical course of medicine.

Henry Blythe lost no time in acting upon the sound advice given him by the boy jockey.

The gray filly upon whom so much depended, was taken home to Glendale, and there exercised under the eye of her owner, by the light-weight jockey whom he had selected to ride her. The news of this engagement was quickly spread abroad, and the result fully justified True Blue's prediction.

There were no more plots aimed against the boy jockey, nor did the gray filly come to harm. Either the plotters were satisfied that she could not win, or else they had secretly "seen" the new jockey.

The veteran turfite played his part like an actor born. Time and again he repeated his warnings and instructions to his new rider, and promised him a rich reward in case he should pilot the filly to victory.

The lad was a first-class rider, whose reputation was fair, yet the very day after his engagement was made known, the filly went down in the betting, until the odds stood at two to one on Midnight. There was no such margin, if all had been upon the square, and Henry Blythe knew that his jockey had sold him. But he never allowed his manner to change, and treated the incipient traitor just the same as before.

English Tom was lying in the hospital, suffering the tortures of the damned before his time, but, though he had lost both leg and arm, the surgeon in attendance expressed his belief that the patient would survive the double amputation.

Joe Cochran, the groom, was still in durance vile, awaiting the recovery of his confederate.

Nothing further had been heard from Little Joe, the injured jockey, and True Blue was convinced that the "gutter-snipe" who brought his message, was really a decoy; but in that he was mistaken. The message was a genuine one, and had he acted upon it, he might have been spared much pain and anxiety.

Tim Dorgan had been brought up for trial, but Holman refused to prosecute, and finally succeeded in effecting the fellow's release.

Despite the care with which he was nursed, Dan Clark remained much the same, for the greater portion of the time being out of his head and raving wildly; so loudly that he disturbed the lodgers occupying the adjoining rooms.

Wild and reckless as had been his own life, True Blue was often shocked and sickened by the mad raving of the invalid. Black crimes were shadowed forth, and long-hidden secrets were revealed. But Lucullus Eppicoon appeared to revel in these horrors. Hour after hour he would sit beside the bed, drinking in the words that dropped from the fever-parched lips, as though to miss a sentence would be fatal to his hopes of happiness.

There were many allusions to his stealing away the baby boy, but they appeared to be mixed up with other crimes, and True Blue grew tired of expecting the clew that never came.

Day after day True Blue would bundle up and mounting his mustang, ride out of town, then, leaving his horse in a place of security, he would walk and run for many miles, now upon the road, now going across country, leaping fences and hedges, working hard to reduce his weight.

He was just about to mount his horse, after one of these spells of hard work, one week subsequent to the events related in the last chapter, when a fine carriage drew up near him, and a young, richly dressed woman alighted, then hastened to intercept him.

He recognized her even before she spoke. Mr. Eppicoon had pointed her out to him one day, as the particular "friend" of Frank Holman, one Dixie Leftwich by name. Young and beautiful, one of three sisters, their story was a sad one. Sold to crime and shame by their own mother, before they were old enough to rightly judge the consequence—but enough. Their story has been written in letters of fire by a better pen than mine.

As soon as he saw that she meant to address him, True Blue instantly suspected a trap, nor

did her first words tend to lessen this suspicion.

She said that there was a plan on foot to abduct Miss Cora Blythe, and force her into marrying a man whom she despised. That she had overheard the plot, and hastened at once to warn him, that he might put Miss Blythe upon her guard.

"If this is true, why not go at once to—Mr. Blythe?" demanded the boy jockey.

"Why do I not go to her, you started to say," the woman replied, with a hard laugh. "For the very reason that made you hesitate about ending your question. You know what I am. You know that she would not listen to me, even if I could gain access to her presence. And for the same reason I cannot go to Mr. Blythe. He would order the servants to drive me from his door. No; I am running the risk of alienating my dearest friend in giving this warning. Not that I love her so well; but because he—Frank Holman—is the man who is to marry her, if the plot is successful."

"That man has three different times tried to get me into serious trouble," slowly uttered True Blue. "How can I tell but this is another trap?"

"I can easily convince you, if you will trust me. I can take you where you can overhear them talking. I will go with you. You are armed. You can hold your pistol to my heart, ready to fire at the first sign of treachery. Only you must promise me one thing. He—Frank—is forced into this plot against his will, by one who holds his life in his hand. You must promise not to injure him, if I take you there. After you are gone, I will tell him that the whole story is known, and then he must take care of himself. If he still persists, do not show him any mercy. Can I speak any fairer?"

The boy jockey's doubts began to weaken, and when the woman added that if he deemed it necessary he could tell a policeman to watch the house and call for him if he did not reappear within an hour from the time when he entered, he became convinced that she was acting in good faith.

Mounting his horse, he bade her lead the way, and followed her carriage at a respectful distance.

The carriage finally stopped before a large brown brick house, situated in a quiet part of the town, and as Dixie Leftwich alighted, she made a swift sign to the boy jockey, then entered the building.

He dismounted and hitched his horse, with a quick glance around him. Had a policeman been in sight, he probably would have taken the suggested precaution, but such was not the case, and he entered the house.

"Walk carefully," whispered the woman, leading the way along the passage, dark and narrow, which extended the length of the front parlor.

They mounted the stairs, and passed to the rear of the building, where Dixie cautiously opened a door and entered. True Blue followed her, when she gave him a sudden push aside, then sprung back and closed the door. The key turned sharply, and he knew that he was entrapped!

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TRUTH AT LAST.

MR. LUCULLUS EPPICOON made a very attentive nurse, and few words dropped from the fever-parched lips of the blind and crippled patient that were not carefully stowed away in the capacious memory of the little detective, to be overhauled at his leisure, and the wheat separated from the chaff.

Poor Dan was generally worse in the afternoons than in the mornings, and with a rare generosity the little snuff-colored man took it upon himself to watch over the patient during the latter half of the day, sending True Blue out to do his training for the big race.

This division of work soon became a matter of course, and Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon was left on guard at noon of the day on which True Blue was beguiled from the path of prudence by the siren tongue of Miss Dixie Leftwich.

The little brown man appeared to be in a very inquisitive mood that afternoon. He carefully locked the door, then tiptoed to the side of the bed where Dan the Devil lay as silent and motionless as though the breath had forever left his body.

But the little man was not alarmed. He knew that his patient was far from being dead, and his experienced eye told him that this death-like calm would shortly be followed by another long spell of delirious wandering. He chuckled heartily to himself, rubbing his hands together in silent glee, as though in anticipation of a glorious feast.

Turning away from the bedside, he cast a swift glance out of the window, where a shabby-looking fellow was idly sunning himself under the lamp-post, then knelt down beside a trunk belonging to the boy jockey. The lid resisted his efforts to raise it, but the little snuff-colored man only smiled the more, and produced a bit of pliable wire from an inner pocket. Bending and twisting this he inserted one end

into the key-hole, and the bolt flew back as by magic.

Settling himself comfortably upon the floor, Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon examined the contents of the trunk, one by one, carefully reading the few letters and papers which he found therein, but finally replacing everything except the timeworn suit of clothes which True Blue wore when he made his *debut* as a boy jockey.

These garments, though they proved a rather tight fit for his plump person, the little detective proceeded to don, chuckling heartily though silently the while, as though there was some huge jest connected with this solitary masquerade.

He had barely time to catch a single glimpse of himself in the mirror, when the voice of the fever patient uttered the name of the boy jockey—the name which has not yet been used in this story, but which the good old fisherman gave the waif he had adopted in place of the children he had lost—Archie Maclise.

The little snuff-colored man glided swiftly to the bedside, but it was the voice of the boy jockey that spoke to the sick man. Not satisfied with assuming the clothes, Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon appropriated the very accent of the boy jockey, soothing the patient with tender, affectionate words, like a doting parent comforting an ailing, irritable child.

While thus talking, he keenly scrutinized the face of the blind man, and carefully counted the rapid throbbing of his pulse. A far-away look came into his eyes, as though he was thinking deeply, and he made no reply to the querulous speech of the sick man, until the thin, scarred hand was placed upon his arm. Then he nodded twice in rapid succession, a hard, steely light coming into his little brown eyes, as he arose and fished up a flat, wicker-covered flask from a pocket of his discarded coat.

A wonderful change came over the haggard face of Dan the Devil, as he heard the musical gurgle of the liquor inside its prison, as the masquerading detective shook the flask; a light like that which comes into the face of a starving man at the first scent of plentiful food. But he said nothing, though he would have given his right hand for a taste of "the craythur," for the doctor had sternly forbidden his tasting liquor, and True Blue had strictly enforced those orders.

Perhaps Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon was softer-hearted. Be that as it may, he moved softly to the bedside and unscrewing the metal top, held the flask to the parched lips of the blind cripple. One heavenly swallow—for such it was to the burning palate of the feverish drunkard—then the bottle was withdrawn.

"Tell me the whole truth, Danny," said the voice of True Blue, emerging from the lips of Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon. "Tell me the whole truth, and you shall have the bottle all to yourself."

"The truth av what, Master Archie?" faltered the blind cripple. "Sure I nivir lied to ye yet—"

"Easy, daddy," interrupted the detective, warningly. "You have been talking while the fever was on ye, and let out a part of what you kept back when you told me about Tracy Talbot and that black day's work. *Danny, who killed my mother?*"

The sick man shrunk away with a low, shuddering moan, and passed one scarred hand across his sightless eyes, as though to wipe out some direful vision.

Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon bent forward, his little eyes glowing like living coals, his features working excitedly. But his voice was cold and stern, and still that of the boy jockey, as he added:

"You must tell me the whole truth, Danny. If you confess all I will still be the same to you, but if you refuse, or attempt to deceive me again, I will go away and never come back to you until you are dead and buried; then I will come to leave a curse upon your grave—"

A sharp cry interrupted him, and with accents that were almost inarticulate from deep agitation, the blind cripple begged him to take back his words.

But Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon was not to be driven from the position he had taken. He was determined to learn the whole truth, and in the end he succeeded, though the tragic story had to be drawn from the blind cripple bit by bit.

A portion of his confession has already been recorded, and a repetition here is needless. The manner in which the man who called himself Tracy Talbot entrapped the burglar; the confession he extorted from his unwilling lips, and the manner in which he used the power thus obtained, may be found in a previous chapter. This, and all up to where Dan the Devil was shown the woman and child, was the truth, but the rest of the story had been greatly softened by Dan, in his fear lest True Blue should leave him to die alone if he knew the truth.

Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon listened eagerly to the confession extorted from the blind cripple, and his pencil moved rapidly over the paper as he wrote down the faltering words.

The man who had assumed Tracy Talbot's name, put Dan Clark upon the track of the woman and child, and bade him kill the latter

as the price of his freedom. At the time, the burglar really meant to carry out the wishes of his employer, and counted himself lucky in escaping so easily.

Fortune favored his designs, for those upon whose trail he was placed, were out for a stroll when the pretended Tracy Talbot pointed them out, and dogged by Dan the Devil, mother and son left the town behind them and climbed the wooded bluff which overlooked the river.

The spot was deserted and lonely. Not another person was in sight, and Dan the Devil felt that his task would be no very difficult one. He could seize the boy, and stifling his cries with the drug which his employer had given him, could easily run away from the mother and gain a safe refuge before she could give the alarm.

This was his first plan, but what he believed a much better one offered itself. The mother seated herself beneath a tree, and opened a book. The child ran here and there, plucking flowers, promising obedience to the mother's repeated caution not to venture near the edge of the bluff.

What if the child should fall over the precipice, to meet its death upon the sharp rocks, or in the swift, deep waters that washed the base? Who could say that it was not accident? And Dan the Devil resolved that such an accident should occur.

The opportunity soon offered itself.

The little boy wandered further away from his mother, until at length she was lost to sight. And the burglar stole nearer the unsuspecting child, with murder in his heart. Nearer still—then, with a swift rush he strove to seize the little fellow.

But his foot slipped upon a tuft of grass, and falling headlong, he just missed his aim. Terrified, the child ran screaming toward its mother. With a fierce curse Dan followed and overtook him, raising him aloft to toss him over the precipice. But the mother had been aroused by the shrieks of her child, and fearless for herself rushed to the rescue.

Dan sprung aside to avoid her, and then, unable to stop in time, the unfortunate woman fell over the precipice.

With tears in his sightless eyes, Dan solemnly declared that he never touched the woman, nor realized her danger until all was over. And the detective felt that he was speaking no more than the truth.

This tragedy so awed Dan that he could not kill the child, but stilling its sobs with chloroform, he put it in a place of safety, hastened to his employer and convinced him that the deed was done. Then, with the written confession in his possession, he fled with the child before the tragedy was discovered.

The manner in which he disposed of the child has already been placed upon record.

For some moments the detective had been watching the closed door instead of the cripple, and as he heard a suspicious sound repeated, he knew that some person was upon the outside, listening at the key-hole!

Softly he arose, and picking up a heavy cane that stood at the head of the bed, glided to the door, and turning the key, suddenly flung the door wide open.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TAKEN IN THE TOILS.

QUICKLY recovering his balance, and guiding himself by the sound of the falling bolt, True Blue sprung swiftly to the door, only to find it closed and all escape cut off in that direction. Grasping the knob, he strove to tear the door open, but he might as well have tugged at the side of the building itself.

It needed no second thought to convince the boy jockey that he was entrapped by his enemies, and even in that moment of natural anxiety, he could not help feeling ashamed of having thrust his neck into such a clumsily set snare. This shame was quickly followed by a gust of rage, and he felt for his revolver, meaning to blow off the lock of the door; felt, but felt in vain, for the faithful weapon had been stolen from him.

Dixie Leftwich must have stolen it while she led him along the narrow, dark passage, or while upon the stairs—at any rate the weapon was gone, though he had assured himself that it was safe and handy for use just the instant before he entered the building.

The boy jockey was never cooler than when in the presence of danger, nor was the present instance an exception. He cast a keen, comprehensive glance around him, taking in the nature and contents of the little room. A low bed, a chair and wash-stand, the latter supplied with a stone wash-bowl and water pitcher, was all the room contained in the shape of furniture.

There was one narrow window near the foot of the bed, and with a sudden hope, True Blue pushed aside the dingy cloth curtain, and looked out upon a stone-paved court-yard, inclosed upon three sides by the brick walls of the house, the other flanked by outbuildings and a high board fence.

In fact the building had been erected for a hotel, and used as such for some years, but was

sold when the business part of the city grew more remote, and finally fell into the hands of the Leftwicks.

The boy jockey saw that escape by way of the window was out of the question, even when aided by the scanty bedclothing, and his thoughts took another turn.

He knew something of the manner in which such houses are conducted. He knew that few of them were unprovided with human bulldogs, whose duty it was to quiet all disorderly or over-particular guests—by awing them into silence, or reasoning with them through the medium of “knuckle-dusters” or “life-preservers,” then pitching them out of the building, or passing them over to some friendly policeman to be “run in” for disturbing the peace.

“That’s the game they think to play,” thought True Blue, as he picked up and carefully weighed the chair in his hands, with an eye to its possible use. “They look for me to raise the alarm and try to force my way out and thus give them an excuse for bouncing me.”

He had no idea that they meant to kill him, but he did believe that the intention was to beat and disable him for the time being, thus making it impossible for Henry Blythe to change his mind and put him up to ride the filly, while, at the same time, Frank Holman would have sweet revenge for the past.

Though he could hardly hope to escape from the building without a struggle, more or less severe, the boy jockey resolved to do nothing to precipitate matters, and to give the enemy no handle for assailing him.

He had scarcely formed this resolution when he heard the sounds of hasty footsteps, mingled with human voices, drawing nearer his place of confinement.

He thought no more of the wise resolution he had formed, but grasped the heavy stone pitcher in his right hand, and holding the chair in his left, stationed himself close beside the door, drawing back the pitcher in readiness to salute the first head that appeared. Then, by following up the attack with the chair, he thought he might be able to force his way to the street.

Perhaps it was as well for all parties that this desperate resolve was not put to the test. Instead of opening the door beside which he stood in readiness, the men—for, from the different voices and footsteps, True Blue knew that they were two—entered the chamber adjoining.

True Blue heard the door close, and sounds as though the two men were drawing chairs up to a table and seating themselves. Then came a voice that he instantly recognized; the cold, measured accents of James Hudson.

“Listen, now, and pay close attention to my words,” the voice was saying. “You must understand what you are to do, before she comes back, for we can’t talk about this matter then; she is so infernally jealous—and I begin to believe she has been listening already.”

“It was not a very wise move, letting a woman like her have a finger in the pie,” uttered a deep, unpleasant voice that the boy jockey had no difficulty in recognizing as that of Tim Dorgan.

“Wise or foolish, that does not concern you. All you have to do is to obey orders. You will be paid well and share none of the risks. You tried your hand once, and made a miserable botch of the job. Dixie can do no worse, and may succeed, though that infernal boy is sharp as a needle, and harder to hold than an electric eel!”

Thanks to the thinness of the deal partition which had been loosely run up between the two rooms, True Blue had no trouble in distinguishing every word spoken, as he pressed his ear to a narrow crack. And at this concluding compliment, a grim smile stole over his features, for it was uttered with an angry petulance that was highly gratifying to the listener.

“At the same time,” resumed Hudson, “it won’t do to let her know what we really intend doing. She is so dead gone on Holman, that if she knew what we are working for, she would blow the—”

The speaker abruptly ceased as a hasty footstep was heard, and a hasty hand rattled at the lock, as the voice of Frank Holman demanded entrance.

True Blue breathed a silent curse at the interruption, for he felt that James Hudson was about to make an important revelation, which he would in all probability now miss overhearing.

He heard Hudson arise and unlock the door, with a surly growl at the other’s keeping them waiting.

“It’s lucky that I did wait,” panted Holman, who appeared to be quite out of breath. “I’ve learned more than enough to pay me. Give me a sup of that whisky. I’ve come like a racehorse—”

“To do your blowing here,” sneered Hudson. “What have you learned? another mare’s nest?”

“It would serve you right to let you find out for yourself,” retorted the gambler, snappishly. “After all, it is your work, and I’m a fool for putting myself out, when there’s no thanks to be gained.”

“Will you tell us just what you mean, Mr. Holman? As for doing my work, if you would prefer to work for the good of the State, you have only to speak the word, and I will secure you a permanent situation. Which is it—speak out?”

“You needn’t pick a fellow up so sharp,” muttered the gambler, evidently cowed by the hidden meaning of Hudson’s speech. “If I was late, it was for your good. I know the whole truth now. That blind cripple is Dan Clark—”

A sharp exclamation burst from the lips of James Hudson, and True Blue himself but barely refrained from following suit.

A red light filled his eyes, and he glued his ear to the crack, holding his breath lest he should lose a single word of what was to follow.

“I heard the whole story, listening at the keyhole,” resumed Holman. “The old man was telling the boy who he really was—”

Again there came an interruption, this time from Dixie Leftwich, who burst into the room excitedly, crying:

“How came you to choose this room? Fools! the boy is in yonder, and can hear every word that is spoken here!”

“What boy?” demanded Holman, sharply.

“The boy I was to entrap—True Blue. He has been there for nearly half an hour. That fool Jessie told me you had not come yet—”

Holman interrupted her with a hard laugh.

“Half an hour ago that boy was in his room, talking with Dan Clark. You have made a fool of yourself, Dixie—you have caged the wrong bird!”

“If there is a mistake, you made it, not I,” was the sharp response. “I brought the boy here—the one you pointed out to me—the one who rode the gray filly in that race—”

“Stop talking,” sternly uttered Hudson. “It is easy to see which is right. In the next room, you say?”

Thus far the boy jockey had listened with an interest the intensity of which words could but faintly picture.

Not altogether on account of the danger which threatened himself, though that was not to be despised. But because he felt that he was at last upon the trail of the truth—that he had discovered the man who assumed the name and story of the genuine Tracy Talbot, in order to conceal his own crime.

He knew that the discovery was mutual, and the last words of James Hudson put him upon his guard. If indeed his suspicions were true, then he need expect no mercy at the hands of the man who had once sought his life. The dark past would be wiped out by a darker present.

There was one chance, despite the odds of three to one. The woman would tell them that he was disarmed, and they would not be too cautious in their approach. He might break through them and gain the outer air. At least he would make a good fight for life.

As once before, he stole close to the door, and stood with the heavy pitcher, half full of water, raised to fell the first man who came within reach, while the chair was held in readiness for use against the others.

True Blue was not kept long in suspense. He heard the sounds of footsteps approaching, then heard the bar removed and the key turned in the lock.

The door was flung open, and he sprung forward. But the enemy was not within arm’s-length, having retreated a few steps. He dared not hesitate, but flung the pitcher with all his force, then clubbed the chair.

The ceiling appeared to fall upon his head, and the darkness of death suddenly came over him!

CHAPTER XXVII.

WEAVING THE WEB.

DIXIE LEFTWICH had told the men that the boy jockey was unarmed, and produced the revolver which she had adroitly stolen from him a moment before leading him into the little chamber, in confirmation of her words, but James Hudson was not a man to run any unnecessary risks. True Blue had already proved himself a tough customer in more ways than one, and since the startling announcement of Frank Holman, the arch plotter would have lost his right hand rather than suffer the youth to escape.

It was this, rather than personal fear, that led James Hudson to take the precautions he did, and the result fully justified his foresight.

Tim Dorgan was placed in ambush close beside the entrance, bearing a heavy “sand-club.” Hudson himself unfastened and flung open the door, then sprung lightly back beside Frank Holman.

The heavy pitcher passed between their heads, and was shattered to atoms against the opposite wall, but nothing befell them more serious than a liberal sprinkling of water.

Through this shower-bath they saw True Blue in the act of springing upon them, with uplifted chair, and they instinctively prepared to meet his onset. But Tim Dorgan was too experienced a hand to botch his share of the work, and as True Blue passed the threshold, the deadly sandbag descended with unerring aim and resistless

force. The boy jockey fell like a log to the floor, and dropping his weapon, Tim Dorgan sunk upon his knees beside the quivering body, and clasped his brawny fingers around the unfortunate lad’s throat.

“Say the word, boss—or only give me a sign, and the little rat’ll never give you any further trouble,” he grated, looking up at James Hudson with a wolfish look in his bloodshot eyes.

Though the white, hard-set face did not show it, there was a stern struggle going on in Hudson’s brain. The temptation was a strong one, but as he saw the willing hands of Tim Dorgan begin to close tighter around the throat of the senseless boy jockey, prudence prevailed.

“No—that would leave tell-tale marks. Tie him hand and foot and put him on the bed in yonder until I can decide what shall be done with him.”

Though grumbly and with little fancy for the job, Dorgan did as directed. Then the door was closed and firmly secured, and the boy jockey left to die or recover as best he could.

Hudson bade Dixie lead the way to the room which had been intended for their occupation, and when this was done, in terms more forcible than polite, bade her take herself away. Without a sign of anger at this cavalier treatment, the young woman obeyed, but had not James Hudson been a little thrown off his balance by the startling discovery he had made, he would have distrusted this too meek acquiescence.

“You can go too, Dorgan,” he added, when the young woman had disappeared. “There is nothing more for you to do to-night, and you already understand what is expected of you. Call here twice a day, for orders, and hold yourself in readiness to act at a moment’s notice. Go—and keep sober until this job is well ended. You understand?”

The burly ruffian nodded, then left the room. Hudson seated himself at the table and signed Holman to follow his example.

“Now, tell me just what you overheard at the hotel. Word for word as near as you can repeat them.”

The gambler obeyed. His ears were keen, and his memory an extraordinary one. A short-hand reporter could hardly have given a more accurate account.

“It must have been that cursed detective,” muttered Hudson, frowning darkly. “He is noted for his powers of mimicry. He was living here at the time, too. He worked up the case against Tracy Talbot. May the lightning blast him! If he crosses my path now, he will never hunt another man to the gallows!”

“What do you think of doing?” asked Holman, curiously. “Lucky Coon can put two and two together—”

“That is my affair—don’t trouble yourself about me,” and as he spoke James Hudson regained his wonted cold composure. “If you are thinking to get a counter hold upon me, you are mistaken. You have no proofs—no witnesses; it would be your word against mine, and if I chose to tell the true story of that bank robbery and the murdered cashier—”

“For God’s sake be still!” gasped the gambler, trembling like a leaf, and casting a fearful glance over his shoulder. “You know I am true to you—”

“True to yourself, rather,” sneered James Hudson, who appeared to be in a fit mood for exercising his power. “You know that a single word from my lips can send you to the gallows. And that word will be spoken at the first sign of rebellion on your part. You shall unhesitatingly do whatever I bid you, or die the death of a dog!”

Holman made no reply, but a dangerous light came into his eyes, as one hand slowly moved toward his breast.

Hudson saw the motion, read it aright, and laughed, low and mockingly.

“You would sign your own death-warrant in killing me, Frank Holman. You would be arrested within an hour, for that little job of last May—”

“Don’t drive me too hard, then,” sullenly muttered the gambler. “There’s times when I’d rather be hung than live on with you for a master. You will taunt me once too often for your own health—mind that.”

“Perhaps I was too hard upon you, Frank,” said Hudson, with a change of tone and manner. “But you have been growing restive of late, and I had to put on the curb, for your own sake. We will let the past drop, and stick to the present. You have thought over the proposal I made you?”

“Yes—but I can’t see through it. What are you—what am I, to gain by it?”

“Your gain will be both money and safety. On the day that you marry Cora Blythe, I will make over to you ten thousand dollars, and give you the dying confession of your pal in that little affair.”

“The girl hates me—she would not look at me.”

“Then she must be led to see the error of her ways,” said Hudson, with a short, disagreeable laugh. “There are more ways than one of killing a cat. I have changed my mind since we talked last upon the matter. Instead of trying

to make the silly girl fall in love with you, we will have the wedding first, and the love-making at our convenience. I haven't decided just when it is to be done—that will in a measure depend upon the manner in which the race for the Cup ends."

"Midnight must win it," interrupted Holman, the eager light of a true-born gambler filling his eyes. "Aphrodite is the only one in the list that has any chance of beating him in a fair race, and I have made sure of her jockey—"

"No game is ended until it is played out. The boy has agreed to sell Henry Blythe, but what security have we that he will not sell us, provided he can make more by doing so? It would not be the first 'double cross' I have seen. There would have been more risk, but I almost wish we had poisoned the filly. The bets are all 'play or pay,' and then the old dog would have been ruined beyond all doubt."

Holman gazed at the frowning face of his mate in iniquity, and would have given much to have had the questions which rose to the tip of his tongue answered, but he dared not put his curiosity into words.

"Never mind the race," said Hudson, shaking his head impatiently, as though striving to cast off all disagreeable thoughts. "About the girl. She is very proud and high-spirited, for all she looks so meek and childish. And that is the trait I intend to work on."

"I have a plan almost perfected by which I hope to induce her to leave her home willingly, though, of course, under a mistaken idea. But that won't serve her. The servants will see that there is no force used, as long as they can see anything."

"Once away from the house, we will take her direct to your rooms, and there she must pass the night in your company. If she is not too frightened to give us trouble, we can use chloroform, or gag her under her veil. She must be seen to enter your rooms with apparent willingness, and you must let it be known that she spends the night there in your company. As to your treatment of her, you can use your own judgment. Only remember this. She must be so compromised that her only escape from utter disgrace will be through marrying you. I will see that there is no doubt; I will drop in upon you early in the morning, with a couple of reputable witnesses, and it will go hard but we can shame her into marrying you. What think you of the plan?"

The gambler looked as though it was a bitter pill to swallow, but he was saved the necessity of making any reply, for at that moment a heavy knocking was heard down-stairs. A brief pause—then a sharp, peculiar voice was heard demanding admittance.

With a fierce, grating curse Hudson sprung to his feet.

"It is that infernal Lucky Coon! He has followed you—he has come to rescue the boy—True Blue!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DETECTIVE ON DUTY.

PROMPT and decided as were his actions, Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon was too late to arrest the spy who he felt confident had been listening at the key-hole of his door. The corridor was empty when he sprung forward to catch the eavesdropper, but he was just in time to see a door beyond and upon the same side of the corridor close.

This was hardly necessary to confirm the detective's suspicions. The story told by the blind cripple, Dan Clark, had made this, among other things, quite clear to him. He knew now why James Hudson and Frank Holman had so persistently plotted against the welfare of the boy jockey. They had recognized either Dan Clark or True Blue, perhaps both of them. At any rate, they had suspected something of the truth, and what the spy had overheard that evening would convince them of the danger that overhung their heads.

These reflections passed through the mind of the little brown detective with the rapidity of lightning, and he drew back inside his door. He knew that the spy could not have seen into the room, since the key had been in the lock, and his ears would have been deceived by the assumed voice. It was best that they should continue to think that it was the boy jockey who had received the sick man's confession.

"Whoever it may be, he can't leave the hotel without passing by this door," reflected the detective, "and it'll go hard with me but I'll catch a glimpse of the varmint. Not but that I know pretty well who it is. That's Holman's room, and he's playing dog to old Hudson. Lord—lord! how blind the best of us are at times! To think that such a job as this has been lying under my feet for nearly twenty years, and I never suspecting but what it was all on the square!"

During this soliloquy, Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon had left his door a little ajar, keeping his ear close to the aperture, listening for some sound from the room to which the eavesdropper had retreated. But now his tactics changed, as a new and better plan suggested itself to his fertile mind.

Hastening across the room to the one window, which looked out upon a side street, he protruded his head through the opening, and almost immediately beheld what he desired.

A shabby-looking little man was leaning against the lamp-post upon the opposite side of the street, lazily whittling a stick.

Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon gave a little chuckle of satisfaction and withdrew his head, producing note-book and pencil and scribbled a few lines at a furious rate, keeping one ear open for sounds along the passage.

Tearing out the leaf, he twisted it tightly around a silver dollar, for want of a less expensive weight, and returning to the window, gave a short, sharp whistle, then tossed the parcel toward the shabby little man. That worthy started as though to cross the street, and when he neared the spot where the note lay, he dropped the stick he was whittling. Stooping for it, the paper was secured at the same time.

Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon nodded approvingly.

"Only for whisky, that man need take a back seat for nobody. As it is, he has taught me more than one wrinkle. A quicker eye for seeing through a tangle—I knew it!" with a silent chuckle, as he heard rapid footsteps ascending the stairs.

In that note the detective had mentioned the number of the room into which the eavesdropper had retreated, and bade the shabby little man find out who the occupants were.

Whatever plan the police spy may have formed, was rendered unnecessary by the appearance of Frank Holman, who left his room and passed swiftly by the door of the room where the detective stood. If he hoped to escape recognition, he was foiled. Through a narrow crack, those little snuff-colored eyes penetrated his rude attempt at disguise, and 'Lucky Coon' knew that he need look no further for the spy. The very precaution which the gambler took, served to convict him all the more surely.

The instant Holman's head sunk below the level of the floor, as he descended the stairs, the detective hastened to meet the shabby little man.

"Follow that man until you run him home. Then send me a note by the first messenger you find. Stay on guard yourself. Go—and lively!"

Without a word the police spy turned and disappeared down the stairs.

Re-entering the room, Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon stood for a few moments watching the face of the blind cripple, who lay motionless, exhausted by the long story he had told, and the natural agitation born of such a confession.

Apparently this scrutiny was satisfactory, for the little brown man nodded toward his reflection in the glass, a pleasant smile upon his lips.

With noiseless rapidity he stripped off the garments he had appropriated from True Blue's trunk, and resumed his own snuff-colored suit. Replacing the articles in the trunk, he lighted a cigar, and seating himself at the open window, prepared to enjoy himself.

But he was not to remain long undisturbed. A sharp exclamation parted his lips as he caught sight of a man almost running along the street below. It was the person whom he had directed to never lose sight of the boy jockey for a moment, while he was outside of the hotel. Up to this time, the man had faithfully performed this difficult duty, and so adroitly that True Blue never for a moment suspected the fact.

"I might have known that everything was working too smoothly to last," muttered the detective, as he hastened out of the room, to meet his employee.

He was met by the man at the head of the stairs, but the angry reproaches which arose to his lips were checked by the frank, unembarrassed glance which met his glittering eye.

"Freeman sent me to report, sir," and the man respectfully touched his cap. "He could not find any other messenger handy, and I thought it would be a saving of time, since I can tell you my story as we go along."

"What has happened—why have you left the boy—and where?" hurriedly demanded the detective.

"He is in the same house with the man whom Freeman was shadowing. If I may be allowed to say so, I believe the young gentleman has been entrapped."

"What were you doing, then? what am I paying you for, but to keep him out of trouble?"

"Begging pardon, sir, but if you will only hear me out, I don't believe you can blame me. My instructions were to keep an eye upon the young gentleman, but not to interfere unless there were signs of foul play."

Here he gave a brief description of the interview between True Blue and Dixie Leftwich, adding:

"I could not get near enough to overhear their words, but the young gentleman followed her of his own accord. I saw him enter the house—the one kept by the Leftwicks—of his own free will, and I had no excuse for interfering. You know boys will be boys, sir, and if I had made a mistake, then I could have been of no further use to either you or him. So I

waited and watched until Freeman came up and sent me here."

Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon saw that the spy could not well have acted other than he had, and admitted as much, though he felt assured that, despite his precautions, True Blue had fallen into the hands of his enemies, who would not be more inclined to mercy after the story Frank Holman had overheard.

"Go to the station and tell Fredericks that I want half a dozen armed men for important business. Lead them to the Leftwich house, but keep low until I come, unless you hear a disturbance inside the building. In that case enter—force the doors if there is any delay in opening—and arrest every inmate of the house—you understand?"

The police spy nodded, then hastened downstairs, followed a moment later by the detective.

The latter personage had evidently decided upon the course best for him to pursue, and though foiled at the first place he called at, no one being in, he was soon closeted with a justice of the peace, who had not yet left his office.

Five minutes later Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon emerged from the office, and hastened along the street toward the Leftwich *maison du joie*, where he found his man, Freeman, still upon guard, though the policemen had not yet arrived.

"Your bird is still inside?" he asked, breathlessly.

"Yes; I'm afraid there's been mischief done, though. Tim Dorgan came out a few minutes ago, and the devil was in his face even more than common."

Not a little to the detective's relief, the police spy made his appearance with a squad of men, all stout, determined-looking fellows, and bidding them see that their pistols were all ready for use, Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon entered the narrow passage at their head, and knocked sharply at the door at the further end.

"Open, in the name of the law!" he cried, aloud.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ARRESTED AS A THIEF.

MISS DIXIE LEFTWICH obeyed James Hudson's blunt order to make herself scarce, with a meekness especially remarkable in one of her impetuous, fiery nature, and which would at almost any other time have awakened the man's suspicions. But the most cunning of mankind will make an occasional mistake, when the day of their doom is drawing near, and so it was with James Hudson.

The young woman retreated toward the stairway, but instead of descending them she entered one of the small chambers and wrapped herself head and feet in a dark cloak. Only waiting until Tim Dorgan came out and descended to the lower part of the house, Dixie emerged from the chamber, and silently crept toward the room occupied by the two plotters. She paused for a moment at the door, but apparently could not satisfactorily overhear the speech of those within, for she passed on and entered the adjoining chamber.

The partitions were thin, and had been run up hastily out of thin boards that had not been thoroughly seasoned. In drying, these boards had shrunk considerably, and only for being papered upon both sides, there would have been as little difficulty in occupants of adjoining rooms seeing, as in hearing each other.

Thus Dixie Leftwich was enabled to overhear every word spoken by Hudson or Holman, and a very bitter pill to swallow she found them, too.

The one redeeming trait of her character was her blind fidelity to the man she loved. She knew that he was a heartless, worthless fellow; that he deceived her almost daily in every imaginable manner; that he was a thief, whose hands were dyed deep in human blood, and whose life hung upon the caprice of James Hudson, to whom, as a lawyer, Holman's dying comrade in the crime, had made full confession, duly signed and witnessed.

Not only this, but he had many a time beaten and abused her, when drunk or in a jealous frenzy; but still the lost woman loved him, and would have died in his behalf, had the occasion arose. Still she could play the spy upon him, for she had gained an inkling of Hudson's plot, and dearly as she loved the gambler, she would have drained his heart dry rather than see him the husband of another woman.

With breathless eagerness she drank in every word that was spoken until a few moments before the alarm was given below stairs. Though she could not see his face, she knew by his voice that Frank Holman was only joining in the plot against Miss Cora Blythe because he could not resist the will of the man in whose hands his life lay, and she believed she saw a hope of saving him from both dangers.

Noiselessly retreating from the room, she hastened to the chamber in which True Blue had been left, bound hand and foot though in a state of unconsciousness.

Hudson had taken the key with him, but, as mistress of the house, Dixie had a master-key which quickly opened the door, just as Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon made his demand below stairs.

She did not hesitate, but sprung to the bedside and began cutting the cords which held the boy jockey captive. He was conscious, and apparently but little the worse for Tim Dorgan's murderous assault.

Before she had quite succeeded in her task, a loud crash from below told her that the police had forced the door from its fastenings.

James Hudson also heard the sound as he was hastening to the place where he had left his prisoner, and he knew that there was no time to be lost, unless he would have his perilous work all to do over again.

He was not unacquainted with the secrets of the old house, where many a dark and curious event had occurred, and he believed that the boy jockey might be removed from the building before the police came up. But he was to meet stubborn opposition exactly where he counted upon cordial aid.

Just as he reached the open door of the chamber, Dixie Leftwich lighted the gas, then sprung forward as though to bar the entrance.

True Blue was leaning against the foot of the bed, pale and still weak from the effects of that cowardly blow, but with no trace of fear in his face or bearing. Instead, as James Hudson reached the threshold, the boy jockey pressed his left hand upon his breast, raising the elbow of the same arm, to form a rest for the barrel of a cocked revolver.

"Stop right where you are, Mr. James Hudson," he cried, in a clear, deadly tone. "If you dare to cross that door-step, by the Lord that made me, I will blow you through and through!"

Dixie Leftwich sprung between the two, a small but serviceable pistol in her little hand, and the muzzle of which was turned toward James Hudson.

"If there's any shooting to be done here, I'll do it," she cried, and looked as though she meant what she said, too. "Your game is up, Jim Hudson. The police are in the house now, and I'll not let you get me into a worse scrape than you have already. You lied to me, or I'd never have helped you this far. You told me you only wanted to hold this boy a prisoner until after that race was run—stop! Not a step nearer, or I'll shoot you with as little hesitation as though you were a mad dog!"

What James Hudson might have done had another power not interfered at this juncture, can only be surmised. But Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon, at the head of three stout policemen—the remainder of the squad being on guard below stairs—made his appearance and cast the bright glare of a bull's-eye lantern upon the group.

He took in the scene at a glance, though he put a wrong interpretation upon the position of the parties, which, in his opinion, proved the suggestion of the police spy "that boys will be boys," to be the correct explanation of True Blue's visit to the house.

At least James Hudson was no coward. Though he believed that the detective knew all, and that his arrest would surely follow, he did not flinch as the little snuff-colored man turned the light of his lantern full on his face. One hand stole into his breast; that was all.

The detective was strongly tempted to make a wholesale arrest of it, when he saw what fish were in the net, but a moment's reflection decided him to the contrary course, and he touched his bat respectfully to the lawyer, as he said:

"Sorry to see you in such company, sir, but if you will retire for a few moments, I think I can answer for my men's forgetting that they ever saw you here."

Hudson's hand slowly fell to his side. He was thoroughly puzzled. Could it be that his fears were idle—that the detective had no suspicion of the truth—that his inopportune appearance upon the scene was wholly unconnected with his affairs?

"Dixie, my girl," added the detective, entering the room, "you should teach your servants better manners. I'm afraid I've spoilt a door for you, but you can stop the price of the damage out of her wages. I showed her this search-warrant, but she wouldn't open."

Passing her by, Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon paused before the boy jockey, holding the light so that it fell full upon his own face, and winking most extraordinarily, said:

"I've been working the case up against you for a long time, young man, but I think I've got you now. Remember, whatever you may say will be used against you at the trial. Take him, boys!"

As he spoke, Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon twisted the weapon from the hand of the astonished boy jockey, and dexterously handcuffed him. Two of the policemen advanced and half-carried, half-led the prisoner out of the chamber and down stairs.

"Though it don't concern you, of course, Mr. Hudson," said the detective, producing a paper from his pocket, "perhaps as a lawyer you will look over this bit of paper, and tell Dixie that I am only doing my duty in forcing my way into the house when I was denied admission."

The paper was a warrant to arrest the boy jockey for theft, and made out in due form, and

when James Hudson assured himself that it was genuine, he was more puzzled than ever.

True Blue was put into a close carriage, and the detective entered, not speaking until the house where the capture was effected had been left far behind.

Then, with an oily laugh of huge delight, he tore up the warrant and flung the pieces out the window.

"Now let me take off these handcuffs, and I'll explain my reasons for acting as I have. Those fellows were getting too near the truth, and I wanted to give them a cross scent to play with. But never mind that for the present. I've got something more interesting to tell you. In one word—I've found your father!"

The boy jockey gave a sharp cry at this truly startling announcement, but the detective bade him listen, and reserve his comments and questions until all was told.

When the hotel was reached, the little snuff-colored man assisted True Blue to alight, for the boy jockey seemed completely overcome by the strange story told him.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE GREAT RACE.

A SCENE very similar to that with which this story opened, only upon a larger scale. Where there were hundreds then, there are thousands now. But there is the same deep, never-ending murmur of countless voices, the busy pushing to and fro as the crowd sways here and there, the wild yell of some drunken man, or enthusiastic turfite, as his especial favorite canters past, taking a warming gallop before the bell rings for the great race, shouting forth extravagant odds, only to be laughed at by his cooler-headed brethren.

There are eight blanketed animals upon the track, some moderately making the circuit after a style that irresistibly reminds one of a straight-legged wooden-horse, rocking upon a pivot thrust into its belly, for rarely is seen a more awkward appearing animal than a racer doing an exercising gallop under a blanket.

Among those eight are both the black gelding Midnight, and the gray filly Aphrodite, each in prime fettle, and fit to run for a kingdom.

These two are the observed of all observers, for, barring accident, the honors of the race will rest between them.

Old Pharaoh has done his work well, and never a prouder he in the land than the negro as he leads the dainty little lady slowly up the quarter-stretch, while Henry Blythe, walking at her saddle-girths, talks earnestly to the monkey-like jockey who sits the filly with his knees almost up to his chin.

True Blue, in his plains dress, was standing upon the outskirts of the crowd gathered around the pool stand. Pools were selling briskly and, what was rather remarkable in such a heavy betting race, every pool was—"John Smith takes Midnight; how much am I bid for second choice?"

Who was John Smith? Apparently no one knew, unless it was the auctioneer, for he was raising every opposition bid, as though he had an unlimited commission to buy in the black gelding. But the boy jockey could give a shrewd guess, and it may be stated here that his suspicions were right. Messrs. Hudson and Holman, finding that the jockey whom their money had bought, was still retained by Henry Blythe, were making hay while the sun shone, and putting their money upon Midnight at long odds.

Here the bell rung for the jockeys to weigh, and True Blue hastened to meet Henry Blythe. Under his wing he had no difficulty in entering the little dingy weighing-room, and choosing the darkest corner, he hastily stripped off his outer garments, appearing in a racing suit of blue silk from top to toe.

Frank Holman was there, as owner of Midnight, and a hissing curse of rage and dismay passed his lips as True Blue stepped upon the scales, horse furniture upon his arm. He turned deathly faint as Henry Blythe told the official the boy jockey's name and that of the animal he was to ride, for he felt that all was discovered—that defeat and utter ruin stared him in the face.

Great was the curiosity when it became known that the owner of the gray filly had changed his jockey at the last moment, and greater still was the excitement when the new rider rode Aphrodite past the grand stand, looking like a bit of the summer sky.

The recognition was almost instantaneous. Hundreds of those present had been eye-witnesses of that sensational race, two weeks ago, and the air was rent with cheers—True Blue forever!

"Keep your eyes open for snakes," hurriedly muttered Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon, pausing beside Henry Blythe, who was earnestly talking to True Blue, while Pharoah slowly walked the filly to and fro. "Hudson and Holman have put their heads together, and are now very busy with the owners of the other horses. Ten to one they'll try to cut you down, or pocket you."

The judges, in common with the less important rabble, were eager to witness the great race,

and impatiently rung the bell for the horses to prepare for the start. But never yet was there a race started on time, and in this case there was an unusual delay. And when it appeared that the painful suspense was about to terminate, one of the horses loosened or cast a shoe, and of course permission was granted to have it reset.

Few pens could properly depict the tortures Henry Blythe suffered during that tedious delay. His life and honor depended upon the result, but the very worst would be easier to bear than this soul-sickening suspense.

At length he grew so faint that the little brown detective was forced to lead him back to the judges' stand. And from there Henry Blythe witnessed what followed.

At length the vexatious delay is at an end. All of the jockeys are up, and maneuvering for the advantage of the send-off. Midnight had the pole, while Aphrodite was fifth, with three horses between her and the black gelding. And, after considerable trouble, they were sent off in this order.

It has already been stated that the distance to be run was two and one-half miles, consequently the start was from the half-mile post, in order to bring the finish under the wire which crossed the track from the judges' stand to that provided for the press reporters.

Intense was the excitement as the horses swept under the wire for the first time, yet there was no little disappointment at the prospect even thus early, of a one-sided race.

Midnight was leading his nearest competitor a full distance, while the gray filly was in the ruck.

"By the Eternal! they've got the filly in a pocket!"

Who the speaker was, none knew or cared to ask. But one and all saw that the emphatic speech was true.

True Blue felt that the black gelding was the only horse in the lists that was really dangerous, and he kept close watch over him, too close, perhaps, for ere he realized his danger, he was in serious difficulties.

The rider of Midnight sent him forward as though the race were but a three-quarter dash. The second horse slipped in behind him, with number three just up to his hips, while "four" hung upon "three's" quarter, all running so closely together that it was impossible to send a horse between them. And in this "pocket" True Blue found himself!

His first impulse was to pull out and pass around them, as he might readily have done, had it simply been a question of speed. But the other three horses were playing their part, one riding close at his heels, the others alongside. If he attempted to change his ground, he would almost certainly come into collision with one or the other, and thus run the risk of being distanced for foul riding.

It was now clear why Midnight led off at such a dangerous burst of speed for so long a race. He was to gain an advantage that could not be overcome by the filly when she succeeded in getting out of the pocket. And to insure this, the other horses were held well in hand, and the pocket drawn closer as they left the starter far behind.

Yet it was a dangerous scheme, and one requiring delicate manipulating, lest their combination should be too easily read, and the judges declare all bets off, in order to protect the innocent.

For this reason the pocket had to be opened as they came down the home stretch, and True Blue promptly seized the opportunity, giving the fretting filly her head and cutting diagonally across the track, almost to the outer rail, thus rendering it impossible for the confederates to again pocket him, without such palpable foul play as would certainly ruin their game.

But the heart of the boy jockey felt heavy as lead within his breast as he realized what an overwhelming advantage the black gelding had obtained. Nearly a quarter of a mile! Could he do it? Would the little filly be equal to the emergency? She must! it was for life or death! She must do it or die as she ran!

For a few moments the boy jockey urged his mount on at wonderful speed, and wild cheers arose from the intensely excited crowd as they saw him draw clear and perceptibly gain upon the leading horse. But their exultation was tempered with fear—for they knew that no horse living could maintain such terrible exertion through two long miles.

No one knew this better than True Blue him, self, and before the half-mile post was reached he took a steady pull upon the filly, for the first half of his work was done. He had nothing more to fear from the six other horses. Unless the filly broke down under the fearful strain, not one of those six would come within reach of her.

There was no cheering now as the race swept by the thousands of spectators. The interest was far too great. They were all eyes.

Midnight was still leading, almost as far as when he first went under the wire, and the white-faced jockey nodded understandingly as Holman waved his hand from the rails. That

meant to press the gelding to the utmost. What matter if he died or was ruined, just so he pulled off this race? His winnings would buy a thousand others, his equals.

True Blue looked for no orders. His work was cut out for him, and he knew how it must be done, if done it could be.

The filly was given her head, and True Blue aided her in every possible manner. She gained steadily but slowly—too slowly if only the black gelding could live the pace to the end.

So on, past the half-mile post, past the third quarter and into the straight home stretch. Yet Midnight still had a winning lead, and neither jockey had as yet used whipcord. But it came into play now.

Gallant Aphrodite responds nobly, and lets out a fresh link—she draws upon the black gelding, who appears to be laboring—in difficulties! See! he tosses his head as though choking! His tail sharply switches his side!

True Blue sees this, but no more. He plies whipcord and steel with merciless vigor—he forges up—draws alongside—and thus the rivals pass beneath the wire amid a united yell that is almost maniacal—a yell that proclaims them both victors!

Weak from the intense strain, both bodily and mental, True Blue turns the filly and holds up his whip for permission to dismount, ignorant whether he had won or lost.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FOR LIFE OR DEATH.

"DEAD heat between Midnight and Aphrodite; time—"

The rest of the loudly uttered decision was utterly drowned by the wild roar that arose from thousands of indignant throats—from the rabble who howled and found fault upon principle, to those whose all was at stake—each one protesting against what they firmly believed to be an unjust decision.

Those whose faith was pinned upon the black gelding, were confident that he was a head to the good when the wire was passed, while the advocates of the gray filly were quite as positive that their favorite had beaten her rival out by a throat-latch. And thereupon ensued one of those disgraceful scenes which, though less frequent than a quarter of a century ago, are too often realized upon the turf, for the good of that king of all sports.

From two half-crazed partisans of the equine rivals, who fell to blows, the contagion spread until it bade fair to embrace the entire male congregation. Nor was the fray long confined to blows with nature's weapons. Knives and pistols came into play, and only for the prompt, fearless action of the police, both regular and special, the casualties would have equaled those of a moderate battle. As it was, there were several dead men, and more wounded than I care to enumerate.

At the first outburst, True Blue bade Pharaoh hasten with Aphrodite to the stable, lest a bullet, either stray, or aimed by some angry partisan of the rival horse, should kill or disable her.

This done, he sought out Henry Blythe, who was too enfeebled by the terrible suspense he had undergone, to force his way through the surging crowd that overran the quarter stretch. Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon was beside the old gentleman, acting as a sort of body-guard, and with the help of True Blue, the trio managed to draw clear of the crowd, and gain a spot where they could converse with some semblance of privacy.

"I did the best I knew how," said the boy jockey, in answer to the extravagant compliments of the little snuff-colored man. "It was a killing pull, but the little lady answered splendidly, and had there been a dozen yards more to run, she would have left no room for doubt as to the winner."

Henry Blythe shook his head wearily. The killing strain had taken all of the hope out of him. Since the sharp tap of the drum that sent the racers off upon their momentous journey, he had lived a common lifetime, and grown older by many years.

"I pledge you my honor, that I say no more than the truth," he cried, earnestly. "Halfway down the home stretch, Midnight flung up his head as though he was choking—and a few jumps further on, he flirted his tail—quite pumped out. It was only the great headway he was under—that and the skill of his rider—that carried him under the wire, upon his feet. If the filly cools off in anything like decent condition, you have the whole thing in your own hands. They will either draw their horse, leaving you a walk-over, or he will be beaten out of sight."

Beyond a doubt the boy jockey fully believed all he said, but Henry Blythe was far less sanguine. Ill-fortune had been his companion too long, for him to believe that it had deserted him, now that fortune, life and honor hung in the balance.

True Blue carried him off to the stables, eager to learn how Aphrodite had cooled off.

It was here that Frank Holman found them, and though his face was well schooled, there was an uneasy glitter in his eyes that made the heart of the boy jockey beat swiftly for joy—

for he knew that the owner of *Midnight* shared his belief, at least in part.

Henry Blythe, too, saw the other's anxiety, and gave a flat refusal to the proposal that they should divide the stakes, and call it a drawn battle.

True Blue could not help flinging his cap into the air with a shrill yell of joy at this decision, so sure was he of ultimate success.

Frank Holman retired without another word, but there was an evil light in his eyes that put the keen-witted detective upon his guard, and when the bell rung to summon the equine rivals, a dozen trusty men kept hovering around the gray filly, to guard her against any meditated treachery.

The prudence of this move was quickly made manifest.

The horses were being saddled. The quarter stretch was crowded by the excited badge-wearers who were entitled to that privilege, and two men, from hot dispute as to the merits of their respective favorites, drew their pistols. To the outsiders there was nothing especially significant in this fact; but the little detective saw that the pistol of one man was aimed, not at his seeming antagonist, but at the gray filly.

Swift as thought his cane struck up the weapon, and then felled the owner. His men closed upon the two, and bore them away, handcuffed and helpless.

"Get the filly around to the starting-point as quickly as possible!" he said. "I'll scatter my men around the course, and put a lot of our friends on guard. The hounds are growing desperate, and may risk being torn to pieces by the mob, in order to cripple the filly. You, Mr. Blythe, go into the stand and tell the judges that you fear foul play, if there is any unnecessary delay."

True Blue rode away upon the filly, and Mr. Blythe, weak and tottering, was led by the detective up into the judges' stand, and there left to await the result.

There was an animated crowd around the pool-stand, and the stentorian lungs of the auctioneer were exercised to the utmost. But there were no more pools knocked down to "John Smith takes *Midnight*." Vast sums were offered upon Aphrodite, but no one would put a dollar against her, after her truly wonderful performance. Those who had backed *Midnight* were eager to hedge, but all efforts were useless. There were none so poor as to do him honor.

More than ever True Blue felt certain of victory when he came to see the black gelding, stripped for the deciding heat. His coat was staring, his flanks tucked up, and taken all in all, he looked more like a candidate for the hospital than a successful racer.

But there was too much at stake for him to give away any chances, and he carefully watched the horse and jockey, trying to divine the tactics they were to follow.

There was little time lost in getting away. Strength and breath were too precious to waste in needless scoring, and at the first attempt the drum tapped to an even start.

The pace was slow, as was natural. Two and a half miles is a long distance, coming so soon after such a desperate finish, and both jockeys knew that they would have but little strength or speed left at the finish, unless they nursed their mounts carefully during the first round and a half. They knew, too, that the race must be decided upon the merits of the rivals, barring some purely accidental mishap, for the track was lined with keen-eyed spectators, and any attempt at foul riding would be fatal.

Keeping well into the middle of the course, while *Midnight* closely hugged the pole, True Blue found that he could hold his rival with little effort, and saw that the gelding was running heavily, as though his muscles were stiff from his recent efforts.

Side by side they passed under the wire; side by side they passed the quarter, the half-mile, and around the upper turn; but as they entered the quarter stretch, the gray filly drew ahead, running at ease, and at the distance, edged in and took the pole.

Throats that were hoarse with long-continued cheering, now almost split themselves, and it was with great difficulty that the police kept the course clear enough for the racers to pass by.

For a few moments True Blue lost his head in the intoxication of those mad yells, and gave the filly her head, shooting away from the laboring black almost as though he was standing still.

But this did not last long. He knew that he had the race already won, providing the little mare did not break down, and to lessen the danger of this, he took her in hand, contenting himself with maintaining his present lead, until the three-quarter post was reached.

Then he could not resist the temptation to make the victory a signal one, and gave the little lady her head, though carefully aiding her with hand and body. The hot blood thrilled exultantly through his veins as, casting a quick glance over his shoulder, he saw his rival plying whip and spur with the fury of despair. But the black gelding had nothing in reserve. He

had been overdriven in the race proper, and could not respond to the call, though he struggled gamely on, defeated though not disgraced even though he was upon the wrong side of the distance flag as *Aphrodite* passed under the wire, a winner!

A wild, choking scream came from the judges' stand as True Blue sped by, followed by a heavy fall. That cry came from the lips of Henry Blythe a moment before he fell to the floor, like one stricken by the hand of death!

CHAPTER XXXII.

DEFEAT IN VICTORY.

THE boy jockey heard this choking cry and fall even above the frantic yelling and cheering of the convulsed crowd, and instantly divined the truth; but still he did not lose his head. He had won the priceless victory, and would not endanger it by yielding to the strong longing he felt to hasten to the aid and assistance of Henry Blythe.

Quickly checking the panting filly, he turned and rode back to the stand, holding up his whip for permission to dismount. The judges gave this permission, and True Blue hastened with his saddle, etc., to the scale-room, to show that his weights were all right.

These necessary details completed, the boy jockey cast aside his incumbrances and hastened to the side of Henry Blythe.

"Isn't so bad as it might be," said Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon cheerfully, as he caught sight of the white, anxious face of the boy jockey. "Just a touch of apoplexy, and, it may be a bit of brain fever to follow after; nothing to worry after, you see."

Harvey Craven, who was supporting the old gentleman's head, did not appear to view the matter quite so favorably, and shook his head sadly as True Blue met his eyes.

As yet no medical aid had been obtained, but the necessity of prompt action appeared to strike all three at the same instant. Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon volunteered to find a physician somewhere among the crowd, while it was decided that the boy jockey should ride into town at once in quest of a certain eminent doctor, an old friend of the down-stricken turfite.

True Blue did not even wait to change his riding suit, but hastened through the crowd as rapidly as his enthusiastic admirers would permit, and made the best of his way to the stables where he had put up his shaggy little mustang.

Quickly adjusting saddle and bridle, and slipping a stable jacket over his shoulders as a partial disguise to his brilliant suit, the boy jockey mounted and rode swiftly out of the grounds.

He had barely cleared the gates, when a carriage and pair of foaming horses were drawn up right before him, and an eager voice called him by name, as a woman sprung from the vehicle and drew near him.

An ugly light came into the boy jockey's eyes, for he recognized Miss Dixie Leftwich, whom he had not yet forgiven for having so completely deceived him. He touched up his mustang, to pass around her, but the woman was not to be so easily thwarted. With a swift motion and a sure grasp, she stood at the mustang's head, holding the bit with both hands. There was no mode of escape, save by riding right over her, and impatient though he was, True Blue did not fancy that idea.

"You must listen to me!" panted the woman, her eyes aglow, and every line of her face bearing evidence to the truth of her words. "The honor of a young girl depends upon it—the honor of Miss Cora Blythe!"

At the mention of that name True Blue forgot all his suspicions, and was no less eager to hear than the young woman was to speak.

Her story was a brief one, and to the point.

It has already been shown how she learned of the evil plot formed by James Hudson, and since that time, both he and Frank Holman were shadowed by cunning men who were well paid for their time and trouble. But nothing was learned of importance, until that very hour.

Satisfied that almost certain defeat awaited them in case they were forced to run the race over, both of the men left the grounds as soon as Henry Blythe refused their proposal to divide the stakes, leaving a few trusty fellows to buy pools on the filly for them if possible, and to destroy her hopes of winning if they could. In both respects their agents failed, as has been shown.

Holman sent a dispatch to Tim Dorgan to be ready for work that same afternoon. Dixie's spy, though unable to stop the transmission of the message, learned its purport, and hastened to report. Not knowing what else to do, she hastened to find either True Blue or Henry Blythe.

"The train has not gone yet—you may be in time to overtake them—but don't hurt Frank—"

The boy jockey did not wait to hear the end of the sentence, but put spurs to his mustang's flanks, and thundered on toward the depot.

But, fate appeared to be against him. Just as he came in sight of the depot, he saw the train move away, and though the little horse did its best, he was unable to intercept the cars. Rushing into the depot, True Blue inquired

when the next train went out, and his heart sunk heavy as lead at the prompt response. There was no other train in the direction he wished to go for three full hours—an age, under the circumstances!

For a few moments True Blue stood like one stunned. He knew not which way to turn. But then he bethought himself of the telegraph. Swift as the cars flew, the wires did their work even more rapidly, and there might yet be time to put Cora Blythe upon her guard!

There was no office at the depot, and on inquiry, he was told that the office was near the other end of the town. He was a stranger in the place, having only ridden over from Glendale two days before, and time was too precious for him to spend much of it in hunting up the telegraph-office—precious, because he had resolved not to wait for the train that left three hours later.

Hastily writing a message upon a leaf of his note-book, the boy jockey looked about for a messenger to carry it to the office. There was only one man in the dirty little depot, besides the clerk, and though True Blue would have preferred a more intelligent looking fellow, as well as one less addicted to drink, this was no time to be captious.

Thrusting the message and a ten-dollar gold-piece into the man's hand, he said:

"Send that message by telegraph, and keep the change for your trouble. Make all haste—it's a matter of life or death!"

True Blue fairly thrust the bewildered fellow outdoors, and sent him off on a dog-trot, scarce able to realize his good fortune.

The boy jockey mounted his mustang and rode rapidly up into the town, looking for a livery stable. This was quickly found, and entering, he dismounted.

As a stable boy came forward, he tossed him a gold coin, crying:

"Go get me a flask of the best brandy you can find—if you are back here in ten minutes, I will give you the mate to that coin."

The little darkey did not wait for a second order, but darted away as though fresh shot from a catapult.

"Give me the lightest bridle you've got," cried the boy jockey to a groom who was standing by in open-mouthed amazement at the audacity of this stranger. "I'll leave my saddle and bridle here as security. Quick! It's a question of life or death, I tell you!"

The fellow obeyed this order mechanically, and it was plain to be seen that all manner of wild suspicions were struggling through the dust that enveloped what served him in the place of brains. But if he saw this, True Blue was too excited and too busy to care for them.

He stripped the mustang and washed his back and limbs with water fresh from the pump, then girthed a light blanket upon his back. Then adjusting the light bridle, he turned impatiently toward the entrance, only waiting for the negro lad to return from his errand.

A wild, almost impossible scheme had taken possession of him, body and soul. It was to measure horse-flesh against steam—to run a race with the cars—a fair young maiden's honor the stake!

Fifty miles as the crow flies! The little mustang against the Iron Horse! Long odds indeed!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

RACING AGAINST TIME.

SINCE the wild and seemingly impracticable idea first occurred to him, True Blue had not once remembered the important mission on which he had ridden into town, but now it came back to him as he stood impatiently waiting for the return of the negro lad with the brandy. It came back to him with a sharp pang of compunction at having forgotten the one who had been so much to him of late days, for even a moment.

Just then his sable Mercury returned, panting and out of breath, but with the precious flask close clasped to his ragged bosom. In that brief space of time, he had run half a mile, besides performing his errand.

True Blue was thinking rapidly. He did not know the names of the streets, and though he had the address of the eminent physician, he knew that much time would be lost in inquiring his way in case he undertook to perform the errand himself—time that might make all the difference between life or death—honor or dishonor to one whom he counted as of far more value than his own life.

An accident might delay or hinder the deliverance of his dispatch, and the enemy might strike their dastard blow before Cora Blythe had any suspicion of their purpose. Or, even if the message was promptly delivered, the danger would not be at an end. Neither James Hudson nor Frank Holman were men to balk at any common obstacle. If stratagem should fail, they were desperate enough to use force. And it was in hopes of being able to protect her from this, that the boy jockey resolved to send the negro lad to the office of the physician with an explanatory note, rather than lose any more precious time by doing the errand himself.

He knew that Henry Blythe was in good hands,

that the little brown detective would not be long in securing the services of a physician from among the many who must form part of that immense gathering. Even if the negro lad should fail in finding the doctor, the delay would be no very serious matter—while Cora Blythe was helpless, unguarded, alone!

True Blue wrote the note and sent the negro lad upon his errand, not forgetting to put a glittering gold-piece in the greedy little paw according to promise, then sprung upon the blanketed back of his mustang and rode out of the stable, entering upon the greatest race of his life—and for the highest stakes that ever hung trembling in the balance.

He rode through the streets with as great speed as he dare, lest some surly policeman, his temper soured through duty obliging him to keep upon his beat in the almost deserted town, rather than be enjoying the great race, should arrest him for fast riding.

As he rode along, he saw a bruised and bleeding mass of humanity being lifted into the cart, to be taken to the hospital, but he never gave the unfortunate wretch a second glance or thought.

Why should he? And yet, there was a glittering gold coin and a blood-stained bit of paper in the hand of the body, for that quivering heap of bruised flesh and broken bones was all that remained of the shabby little man whom True Blue sent with his telegraphic warning to Cora Blythe!

But the boy jockey rode on past the cart, and never once suspected the truth. Rode on through the town, increasing his pace as he neared the outskirts, then flung off his stable jacket and settled himself down for a fifty-mile race against time!

A few explanatory words will show that this venture of the boy jockey was not quite so foolish or hopeless as it may appear at first glance.

As already stated, Glendale, Henry Blythe's breeding farm, and where Cora Blythe now was, confined to the house by a sore throat that prevented her from accompanying her father to witness the signal triumph of the gray filly Aphrodite, was situated some twelve miles from the city where the trial race came off. But there was one station upon the road nearly two miles nearer Glendale, and at this point the boy jockey felt assured Hudson and Holman would leave the train, and be driven the remaining ten miles by Tim Dorgan. The road over which they must pass was hilly and broken, where fast time would be impossible.

The city where the great Cup race came off, was about fifty miles from Glendale, or nearly sixty, if all the windings of the country road were calculated. True Blue in his rides and walks to reduce his weight, had pretty thoroughly explored the country, and believed that he could reach Glendale by riding but little more than fifty miles—and that distance, barring accident, he knew he could cover in little more than three hours.

At the best it was a very faint chance, but an accident might delay the enemy and after getting their dispatch Tim Dorgan would have to prepare his horses, then, even if Cora failed to receive his warning, there would be some delay in persuading her to enter their trap—he must succeed!

It would be a waste of time to record all the thoughts and hopes that flashed through the mind of the boy jockey. At times he was hopeful, confident that success would reward his efforts, but only to be plunged into the depths of despair and sickening doubt a moment later, as he saw how swiftly the precious moments were fleeting, and how slowly the distance was lessening.

Yet he did not lose his head, and rode with excellent judgment, remembering how much yet remained for the little mustang to accomplish.

Gifted with an excellent eye for speed and distance, True Blue made his miles average a little less than three minutes each, easing his trusty mustang over the worst bits of the road, then sending him ahead at racing speed when the ground improved.

The short, cat-like leaps of the animal would quickly have worn out any rider not, like True Blue, thoroughly accustomed to the motion, it was so different from the long, swinging, cradle-like movements of an American horse. But the little mustang was able to break down two such animals, as the boy jockey knew from experience, and in a long race like this would have far distanced the finest thoroughbred that ever trod the turf.

For nearly one-third of the distance, or about eighteen miles, True Blue kept to the road, but then it made an abrupt turn to visit an adjacent village, and he took across country, leaping a low fence and entering a wide, level meadow, near the further end of which he knew ran a small, shallow creek.

When this was reached, he drew rein and dismounted, looking at his watch with a grim smile of content. Nineteen miles in fifty-one minutes—or six minutes gained.

Just allowing the mustang to wet its throat, True Blue stripped off the blanket and using his silk skull-cap, dipped up the cool water and

briskly washed the animal's heated back, head and ears, then sponged out its distended nostrils with his handkerchief, wet in the stream.

Two minutes sufficed for this and to replace the blanket, then mounting, he sent the refreshed mustang swiftly across the field, taking the fence in his stride like a true-born hunter. Thus over two more fields, and then out into a firm, level road that stretched along between fields and meadows as far as the eye could see, without bend or turn.

Though now well ahead of time, True Blue made the most of his opportunity, for he knew that the last dozen miles would be severe even for a perfectly fresh horse to cross at speed.

All too soon this difficult piece of work began, and before entering upon it, the boy jockey again dismounted, to ease the faithful mustang and give him a little much needed rest.

Over forty miles had been covered, in a trifle less than two hours and a quarter; but the dozen miles that yet remained to be traversed, were equal to a score such as he had already overpast.

The mustang, though its fiery spirit was unquenched, was weary and jaded, breathing fast and heavily, covered with mingled foam and dust.

A pang of pity and regret shot through True Blue's heart as he examined the faithful creature, that had served him so long and nobly; but there was an even more precious object in danger, and he dared not linger longer.

He opened the mouth of the mustang, and holding its head back, poured the contents of his brandy-flask down its throat, then flung the bottle aside, sprung upon the animal's back, and sent it up the long and steep hill.

The strong liquor soon worked its calculated effect. The mustang needed to be restrained, rather than held in check, and it crossed the rough, difficult ground even more rapidly than it had the smooth, level road.

Then True Blue left the main road, cutting across country. The mustang took the fences, hedges, ditches and other obstacles in its strides, appearing to be possessed of a fiery devil that nothing could check or daunt.

But why dwell upon the hopeless, though heroic task? The handicap was too great, and when ten miles more had been covered, the noble mustang gave one mighty bound, then fell headlong, blood bursting from its nostrils—dead—its great heart broken!

True Blue alighted upon his feet, and never looking back, though there was a blinding mist in his eyes, ran straight on toward the distant house, now in view, though so hopelessly far away. For a mile at heart-bursting speed—then, with a wild, despairing scream, he fell headlong to the ground.

He had caught a glimpse of a woman entering a carriage, that then swiftly rolled away!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

RUNNING FOR HIGH STAKES.

FOR nearly an hour Henry Blythe lay unconscious of all things external, while three physicians whom Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon lost little time in finding and pressing into service, were unremitting in their efforts to restore him to consciousness.

Mr. Charles Reade would have held up his hands in holy horror had he been there to see, for the patient was freely bled; but in this case, at least, the operation was attended with perfect success.

Mr. Blythe recovered his senses and his voice. The first use he made of the latter was to ask how the race had gone, and when told that his filly, Aphrodite, had won, a long sigh of grateful ease followed the announcement.

By his wish he was carried down to the stables, and there satisfied himself that the little lady was but little the worse for her desperate struggle. Then he expressed a wish to be taken back to his hotel, and sunk back into Harvey Craven's arms more like a dead man than aught living.

This was only the natural reaction after the dreadful, killing suspense of the past few weeks, but Craven was very much alarmed, and did not breathe freely until he saw the old gentleman fairly tucked up in his bed, and the great doctor, whom they met upon the road to the racing grounds, gravely seated at his side, feeling his pulse.

"I'm all right—only sleepy—and longing for my dear girl—Cora. Send for her, Harvey," slowly and faintly muttered the old gentleman, as his eyes closed in a deathlike slumber.

"Do as he says," observed the physician. "I do not think there is any serious danger—he appears to require sleep and quiet rest more than medicine—but it is always best to be upon the safe side. I will watch beside him for an hour or so. Then, if there is no alteration for the worse, he will be himself again by to-morrow."

Harvey Craven did not send for Cora Blythe, but he went himself, gladly welcoming the prospect of that long ride in company with his betrothed; a prospect that was fated not to be realized!

By rapid walking, he reached the depot just in time to catch the train that left just three hours after that which carried James Hudson and Frank Holman to the same destination.

Just as he entered the little depot at the village situated ten miles from Glendale, and about four from the city where this story first opened, a train upon another track pulled out, running parallel to that upon which Craven had come.

He had barely time to jump off upon the platform, when his train started on, as though eager for a race with the rival engine.

Just as Craven gathered himself up after his not very dignified or graceful exit from the train, the depot agent came out of the telegraph office attached, a yellow envelope in his hand, an excited look upon his usually stolid face.

He had been recently transferred to that station, and in the days gone by he and Craven had been intimately acquainted; but that friendship did not fully account for the glad cry which broke from his lips as he recognized the other, nor the eagerness with which he greeted him.

"I'd rather see you this moment than an angel, Craven," he cried, thrusting the yellow envelope almost into the young man's face. "The strangest dispatch—read it! Man killed while taking it to the office—read it, man!"

If Craven was astonished by this address, he was even more so when he saw that the envelope was directed to Miss Cora Blythe. Who and where was it from? What did Brown mean?

Before his thoughts could carry him further, a loud cry came to his ears, mingled with the swift clatter of iron-shod hoofs, and looking around, he beheld True Blue dashing up, capless, his face white as ashes, his brilliant silken suit torn and covered with dust, while in the distance rode two men, swinging their hats and yelling out some directions of which only the word *thief* could be distinguished.

"Miss Blythe—has she—gone?" panted the boy jockey, rolling rather than leaping from his horse, which stood with trembling legs wide spread, its head drooping, utterly used up.

The depot agent nodded ruefully.

"She went on the six-ten train. Two men were with her, and she appeared to be either ill or very much agitated, for they had to help her into the coach. I saw that much, but I didn't think of there being anything wrong, until this dispatch came, just now."

With a low, sobbing breath the boy jockey sunk down upon the platform.

To be so near success, and yet be foiled—it was very hard! And for once in his life—the first and last time—he completely gave way beneath the weight of misfortune.

With a sickening fear tearing at his heart, Harvey Craven hesitated no longer, but tore open the dispatch and read the message sent by True Blue, to warn Cora Blythe of her impending danger. But there was a brief postscript appended, which only too clearly explained the delay in transmission.

"The man paid to send this message was killed while on his way to the office. His last words were a request that this explanation might be made."

That was the postscript, and as he heard it read aloud by Harvey Craven, True Blue knew that the mangled, blood-stained mass which he saw lifted into the cart just before leaving the city was the man whom he had unwittingly sent to his death.

But he did not pause to think of that, but cried:

"Telegraph to arrest James Hudson and Frank Holman for abduction!"

His further speech was checked by the arrival of the two men who had chased him from Glendale as a thief, but who started back in mute amazement as they recognized his face.

As stated at the close of the last chapter, True Blue fell exhausted, within one mile of the house, as he saw Cora Blythe enter the carriage brought for her by her enemies.

How long he lay there he never knew, but as a fresh hope struck him, he arose and resumed his mad race, overleaping the fence which surrounded the stables, and not pausing—not even thinking of explaining his strange actions, caught up the first horse he could lay hands upon, and overleaping the high-barred gate, dashed down the road leading to the station like a madman. He never heeded the angry shouts of the two stablemen, who hotly pursued the supposed thief, simply because he never heard their voices, and they could not overtake him, though the young horse he bestrode was saddle and bridleless.

By this time Harvey Craven realized the full extent of the peril which threatened his betrothed, and acted with prompt decision. He saw that the three horses were thoroughly blown, and he knew that by the high road, the city was fully double the distance that it was along the railroad.

"Come!" he shouted, leaping from the platform and tearing off his coat and vest, then binding his suspenders tightly around his waist.

No further speech was needed. True Blue saw what he meant, and the thought of speedy action cleared away his despair and fatigue like magic.

With a cat-like leap he was in front of the over, and racing along the level track with the

speed of a hound-hunted deer. Close at his heels trod Harvey Craven, but unable to pass him, though he was running for such high stakes.

CHAPTER XXXV.

DOWN THE HOME STRETCH.

It will not do to be too critical while dealing with a fashionable, fast young man like Alfred Hudson, who has been motherless almost from his birth, and even worse than fatherless, since a thoroughly evil father can more quickly and thoroughly ruin a son than can a score of other wicked associates.

Under different tutoring, Alfred Hudson would have been a credit to his country and himself, since, with all his disadvantages, he had not been thoroughly spoilt. His heart was better than his head, and underneath that shell of insolent disregard of all that was good and pure, was a kernel of true manhood that only needed some strong emergency to give it birth.

We have said little about the young man after that night on which he allowed wine and jealousy to get the better of him, partly because more interesting subjects claimed our attention, partly because he kept himself closely housed up until now, the evening of the race for the Washington Cup.

Long before the race could have been decided, or even begun, Alfred sent his body-servant to wait at one of the club-rooms, the proprietors of which had constructed a telegraph line from the grounds to their office, for the purpose of securing the earliest possible information regarding the races, the change in betting odds, etc., for the accommodation of their patrons. He would have gone himself, but both of his eyes were still "in mourning" for that sturdy blow dealt him by Harvey Craven, and he was ashamed to venture forth.

Of course the threatened duel never came off. After being shown the door by Henry Blythe, Hudson went to his chambers and went to bed, awakening the next day in his sober senses. He could recall all that occurred at the hotel, and he was really ashamed of himself; so much so that he felt more like giving than demanding an apology. He did send a note to Mr. Blythe, begging his pardon and Cora's, and then felt more like an honest man than he had for some time.

But these twin black eyes alone would hardly have sufficed to keep Alfred Hudson so closely housed up on this momentous day. He, like his father and Holman, had plunged heavily upon the black gelding for the Cup, and if the Fates decided against him, Alfred knew that he would be not only ruined but disgraced. He had felt so confident of winning, that he had wagered double the sum he could pay in case of disaster, but as the day drew near, he began to fear the worst, and make his preparations for a sudden flitting from the storm which would follow.

His valet had plenty of exercise for his legs that afternoon. First he brought word that the horses had been called out, the pools selling with *Midnight* first choice, *Aphrodite* second, the others bunched in the field. Then he came with the announcement that Henry Blythe had changed his jockey, putting up True Blue instead. A third trip was made to announce the dead heat; a fourth to state that the dead heat was to be run off, and that no pools could be sold against the gray filly who was an overwhelming favorite.

All this in a measure prepared young Hudson for the announcement that *Aphrodite* had distanced *Midnight* in running off the dead heat, and though he knew his doom of outlawry had been pronounced, Alfred Hudson felt a sensation of relief, rather than otherwise, as he hastily muffled himself up and hastened down the street to Frank Holman's rooms, where he expected to meet both his father and the gambler as soon as they returned from the city where the race was run. And meet them he did, though under very different circumstances from what he expected.

Weary of waiting, and uneasy at the long delay, he was just thinking of lighting the gas when he heard a hack rattle up to the door, and a moment later hasty footsteps upon the stairs.

James Hudson flung open the door, then stood aside to admit Frank Holman, who entered bearing in his arms the limp, motionless form of Cora Blythe.

The telegram which Brown, the station-master, had sent, reached its destination before the train, but the depot police searched the coaches in vain for their game.

Too cunning to throw away a chance, James Hudson and those with him had left the train when it paused at the junction in the lower part of the city, taking a hack and driving at top speed to Frank Holman's chambers, where they arrived as already described.

Though not a little astonished to see his father and the gambler engaged in such business at a moment like the present one, when ruin and disgrace stared them in the face, Alfred Hudson had no intention of interfering when he stepped forward with a careless greeting. But his eyes were quickly opened to the truth by the fierce

curse which hissed through the clenched teeth of Hudson, senior, and by the sudden start of Holman, which knocked off the bonnet and heavy veil which had until now concealed the face of the form he was carrying.

The dim red light from the fading clouds in the western sky came through the open window, and fell full upon the pale, deathlike face of the unconscious maiden.

With an angry cry of wondering indignation, Alfred Hudson recognized his cousin Cora, and instantly tore her form from the gambler's arms.

Cursing, Holman struck twice in swift succession at the young man, but, though his fierce blows staggered, they did not fell young Hudson, who hastened to place his unconscious burden upon the couch in the corner of the room, then turned and sprung upon the gambler, closing with him despite the shower of heavy blows that almost blinded him. He knew his inferiority to Holman in the matter of using his fists, but he knew, too, that his bodily strength was as much superior.

Even in that exciting moment when he was locked in what might well prove a death-grapple, Alfred saw his father catch up the form of the insensible maiden, and hasten with it out of the door.

Holman saw it too, and stubbornly resisted the young man's desperate efforts to cast him off.

The hand of fate was in it. His hour had come, and he fought for his doom as desperately as, had he known the truth to come, he would have striven to avoid it.

With a power that would not be denied, Alfred Hudson forced the gambler backward, then freed his right arm and dashed his clenched fist full into the handsome, upturned face with all the strength he could muster.

Blinded, almost knocked senseless, Holman relaxed his grasp—and fell headlong out through the low, open window—down to meet his death upon the stone flags below.

James Hudson, bearing the insensible form of Cora Blythe in his arms, left the room and reached the head of the stairs, only to be confronted by two wild-looking, haggard forms. A fierce curse of disappointed revenge broke in a snarl from his lips as he recognized Harvey Craven and True Blue, the boy jockey!

He saw that he was foiled, and a murderous resolve seized upon him. He raised the light form of the maiden above his head, intending to fling her headlong down the steep stairs, but love lent Craven a superhuman strength and activity. With a panther-like bound he sprung upon the madman, and wrested the precious load from his arms.

At almost the same instant the sinewy fingers of the boy jockey were fastened upon Hudson's throat, and a fierce, deadly struggle began—to be ended almost instantly.

Their feet slipped, and clasped in each other's arms, they fell headlong down the stairs, lying in a senseless, quivering heap at the bottom, and almost crushing a little snuff-colored figure beneath them in their fall.

This was Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon, who had been warned of danger by Miss Dixie Leftwich as soon as she learned that True Blue had missed the train.

He took the same train that Harvey Craven did, though neither suspected the proximity of the other, and came straight through, believing that he could intercept the abductors at the depot. To him the dispatch was given, and when he failed to find the plotters, he quickly divined the reason, and at once set out for Holman's chambers. He narrowly escaped being crushed to death by the falling gambler, and a moment later made a similar escape, as recorded above.

He gave Alfred Hudson in charge of the policemen who had followed hard upon his heels, and then bent over the two bodies at the foot of the stairs.

At first glance he believed them both dead, and a sharp pang pierced his tough old heart, for in those few days the boy jockey had grown very dear to him. But then a glad cry parted his lips, and turning his head he bade one of the policemen hasten to fetch a surgeon.

A broken arm proved to be the most serious injury True Blue had received, and an hour later, when the member was duly bandaged and set, the boy jockey was able to stand up.

Not so James Hudson. Though still living, his hours were numbered. Both legs were broken, and his spine dislocated. Death was but a question of time. He did not appear to suffer much pain, but was delirious and raved wildly, unconsciously revealing many a black secret of a misspent life.

Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon had dispatched one more messenger, and when he returned, Dan Clark was with him, now in a fair way of recovery. But as he entered the house, he shrank back with a sharp cry:

"Take me away! It's Thracy Talbot! he'll murdher me!"

The little brown detective assisted True Blue up-stairs, and pausing before Cora Blythe, said:

"Miss Cora, allow me to introduce your brother, Charles!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE BOY JOCKEY REWARDED.

To those persons who read a story simply for the sake of the story proper, caring nothing in particular for the why and wherefore, there will be little of interest in this chapter, and they are hereby warned not to waste their time in reading what their imagination can, probably, picture far more to their own taste. But to those who have patiently followed the fortunes of True Blue thus far, a few parting words and explanations are due.

It will be remembered, that, while telling the story of how he hunted down the genuine Tracy Talbot, Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon made more than one vague allusion to another tragedy which occurred at about the same time as did the murder of Mrs. Daniel Filkins, but as often checked himself before the curiosity of the boy jockey was aroused.

His suspicions had been aroused when Henry Blythe, in engaging him to keep a friendly watch over True Blue, gave him a hasty sketch of the lad's life history, as told by himself, but he kept these suspicions to himself, and resolved to never give them utterance until he had thoroughly tested the worth of the boy. If his suspicions were true, he knew that the wound caused by the disappearance of the child had almost healed over, and to reopen it for an unworthy object was not to his taste.

He did test the boy jockey, as we have seen, and found him fully deserving the sobriquet given him by the enthusiastic Patlander—*true blue* to the core—and then bent all his energies to bringing out the truth.

The story that Dan Clark told him, under the belief that his auditor was True Blue himself, told the detective that he was upon the right track—that the boy jockey was none other than the son whom Henry Blythe had mourned as dead for so many long years.

The only missing link was furnished by the mad ravings of James Hudson before he died. The whole story was made plain, together with the causes and temptations that led up to the crime.

From early youth the cousins, Henry Blythe and James Hudson, had been rivals, and a perverse fate seemed to take pleasure in constantly pitting them against each other.

James Hudson was generally the victor in these contests, but with one of his peculiar nature, a thousand victories are more than offset by a single defeat, and as they grew older the cousins hated each other more and more thoroughly.

Then came the last malicious stroke of perverse fate; the cousins fell in love with the same woman, and bent every energy toward winning her—and balking the other. In this Hudson was defeated. Blythe married the lady, and by her had two children, first Cora, then Charles.

It has not been stated that James Hudson was a widower, but such was the fact. His wife died in giving birth to Alfred, some three years before Henry Blythe married.

Shortly after the birth of Charles, a distant relative of the cousins came on from England to visit them. He was old, very rich, and, his enemies broadly hinted, a little cracked. Certainly he was eccentric enough.

He was completely taken captive by baby Charles, and next to him fancied Alfred. Cora, for some reason, he almost hated.

Two years later he died, leaving his large fortune by will to baby Charles. It was to be held in trust for him until he reached his majority. If he died before coming of age, the property was to revert to his second favorite, Alfred Hudson, and in that case James Hudson was to have sole management of the bequest until his son came of age.

It was an eccentric will, and probably cost one life, if not more.

James Hudson was a gambler almost from his cradle, and falling into serious difficulties, was meditating a black crime when Dan the Devil came in his way, a fitting tool for the foul work.

Dan told Mr. Lucullus Eppicoon the true story of the tragedy. The wife of Henry Blythe met her death by accident, and the shock thus received by the burglar induced him to spare the life he was paid to take away. But this part of the story has been dwelt upon at length in earlier pages.

When the mother and child were missed, long and persistent search was made, but it was nearly a month before the body of Mrs. Blythe was recovered from the deep waters. It was her body that the little detective expected to see when he pressed through the crowd to view the remains of Tracy Talbot's victim.

Nothing was heard of the missing child, and it was generally supposed that he had met an accidental death together with his mother.

The property passed over to the care of James Hudson, and by its aid, he was soon out of difficulties and richer than ever.

But just about the time that this story opens, he received a letter from a lawyer's firm in England, stating that a later will had been found, by which the money, failing Charles, was left to Cora, and making no mention of Alfred. The witnesses to this will were still living, and there could be no question as to its genuineness.

Thereupon James Hudson concocted a truly diabolical plot, and in striving to carry it out, met his death.

He resolved that Frank Holman should so disgrace Cora Blythe that she could not help but marry him. Then, through the power he possessed in that dying confession of Holman's confederate, he meant to force them both to make over the property to him as the price of his silence. This done, he would place the dying confession into the hands of the proper authorities, and do all in his power to bring the son-in-law of his hated cousin to a shameful death upon the gallows.

But death cut short his infamous plotting.

Henry Blythe was easily convinced that True Blue was his long lost son, and received him with open arms. The boy jockey had known the truth ever since that evening when the little snuff-colored man arrested him as a thief in the *maison du joie* of Miss Dixie Leftwich, and this knowledge will account for his desperate efforts to save Cora from the snare of the enemy.

Henry Blythe, though he remained an ardent devotee of the turf up to the day of his death—which occurred little more than a year ago—never forgot the terrible lesson taught him by those few weeks of killing suspense. He raced horses until he died, but he never wagered another dollar upon any one of them. And he found that there was double the sport and pleasure in racing for honor, that there was when a fortune depended upon the result.

The little gray filly, Aphrodite, never ran another race, but was treated like a veritable equine queen, and passed the rest of her days in clover.

True Blue—the name is more familiar and dearer to me than that of Charles Blythe—had the body of his faithful little mustang brought to Glendale, and buried there with all honors.

When the holiday bells rung out that Christmas, they helped to celebrate a very happy wedding, in which Cora Blythe was made Mrs. Harvey Craven, and the two groomsmen were the boy jockey and the little snuff-colored man.

As for True Blue, he never married, but a jollier old bachelor never lived.

Dan Clark did not live long after he saw his sin atoned for, in part, at least.

Alfred Hudson fled from his creditors, and was never heard of afterward.

THE END.

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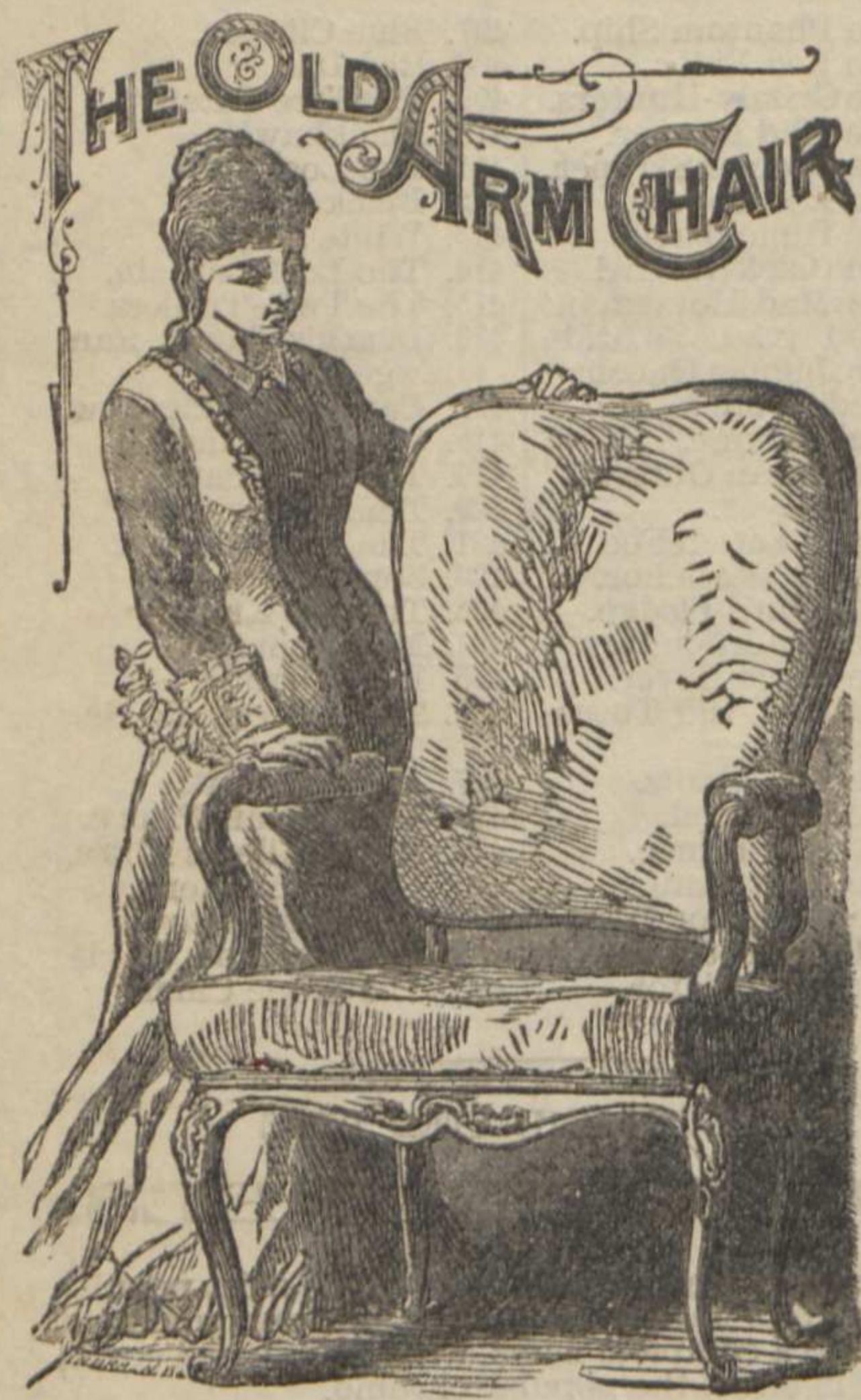
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